

RESPONDING TO THE RHYME OF TIME  
A COMPARATIVE READING OF H.D. AND CHEN  
JINGRONG'S POETRY OF 'NEW BEAUTY' IN THE  
CONTEXT OF MODERNISM

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## Abstract

This thesis reveals the relationship between women's modernist experiments with poetic language and their political aspirations to freedom through the examination of the poetic images of beauty created by American poet Hilda Doolittle (also known as H.D.) and Chinese poet Chen Jingrong in their early poetic careers. To elaborate this assumption, I unpack the poetic image by returning it to its conditions of signification and investigate it by following two threads: one is how language as a medium forms a discourse of beauty with a female subject-position through poetic estrangement and the other is the judgment of beauty and its political implications. In so doing, I present here a much more integrated approach that seeks to overcome a centre/periphery duality. On the one hand, this thesis is an interdisciplinary inquiry crossing the boundary of poetics, aesthetics, and cultural criticism that both resists a static traditional formalist perspective and equally avoids a fashionable inclusive cultural-political criticism. On the other, as a cross-cultural study it resists the traditional concern of recreating an West/East duality, focusing on neither Western nor Chinese culture, but resting its argument on the conversation between them. This new approach provides a rethinking of both the concept of beauty in the poetry of these two poets and their poetic praxis.

Through the examination of the poetic image of beauty, this thesis unfolds the construction of a mode of feminist discourse and then reveals its revolutionary power in society by examining its negotiation with the dominant masculinist discourse. By linking H.D. and Chen's body-based poetics to their pursuit of beauty as the solution to their respective war crises, I argue that both poets articulate a female-centred judgment of beauty through creating unconventional poetic images of beauty. I term this female-centred view of beauty as 'new beauty' by borrowing H.D.'s expression in her poetry "Sheltered Garden". By poetic estrangement, the images of 'new beauty' form a female subject position and make the

poetry of 'new beauty' a discourse articulating a new notion of beauty from a female-centred view. In this discourse, beauty is empowered as active and dynamic, originated by the encounter between two equal parties. The so-called 'new beauty', in this sense, revises the notion of beauty within the Burke-Kantian dualistic aesthetic tradition, which defines it as passive and inferior. Furthermore, I argue that 'new beauty' breaks the masculinity/femininity binary which is the foundation of masculinist discourse. The empowerment of beauty thus empowers women. Through this empowerment, women reclaim their agency and assume a subject position in social activity, equal to men. As a mode of feminist discourse, the poetry of 'new beauty' narrates women's 'reality' based on their bodily experiences, because poetic estrangement as a device that re-personalises poetic images, positing a relationship between the human body and the external world. The images of 'new beauty' shed light on a *new* relationship: women's bodies directly and autonomously communicate with the external world.

The innovative examination of the images of 'new beauty' thus reveals H.D. and Chen's creation and exploration in formulating a new aesthetic intervention in modernism by the revolutionary power of poetic language. The poetry of 'new beauty' responds aesthetically to the modern experience of temporality and fragmentation. The poetry of 'new beauty' also responds politically to the emergence of New Woman, a new social group which calls for women's independence and autonomy. In this sense, both H.D. and Chen actively engaged with rather than escaping from the world. H.D. and Chen's exploration as the examples of individual achievements from different cultures thus provide a paradigm for the construction of feminist discourse and the ongoing liberation of women.

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### Note on Translation

The quotations from original Chinese texts, including the works of Chen Jingrong and other writers and the comments of other scholars, are translated by me, except the translations which is specifically noted in the thesis. I use the Pinyin romanisation system throughout the thesis.

## Introduction

Woman is defined as a human being in search of values within a world of values, a world where it is indispensable to understand the economic and social structure...

—Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*

This thesis examines the dynamic between women's literary practice and gender politics in the context of modernism. Its primary goal is to reveal the relationship between the transformative capacity of literature (the poetic function or poetic language) and women's political aspirations for freedom. This thesis is built up on an assumption that a new aesthetic, based on a female-centred perspective, emerged in the context of modernism. In this sense, the foundation to the thesis is the dialectic between aesthetics and politics. To achieve this goal, the thesis unpacks the poetic image by returning it to its conditions of signification and investigate it by following two threads: language as a medium which forms a subject-position by estrangement and aesthetics and its political implications. I argue that the latter is attached to the former and functions through it. To foreground the impetus of modernism and to illustrate this assumption, I adopt a transnational perspective and thus chose the poetic practice of Hilda Doolittle (also known as H.D.) (1886-1961) and Chen Jingrong (1917-1989), two women poets writing from different cultures and in different languages.

A transnational reading experience along with my background knowledge and research practice in Comparative Literature were the impetus for this extensive investigation on the establishment of a feminist discourse in the context of modernism. When I was reading the poetry of Chen, two lines in "The Non-Flowering Branch" caught my attention: "The non-flowering branch / has a more beautiful shiver than flowers". These two lines



immediately reminded me of H.D.'s concept of "new beauty" in one of her early poems—"Sheltered Garden" written in 1916. Both poets attempted to propose a new definition of beauty in a similar way, although this similarity is not conspicuous. While H.D. stated it overtly, Chen only implied it by contrasting parallel images. A separate reading of H.D. and Chen's poetry may overlook the significant observation. The transnational reading, however, suggests a reconsideration of this association between poetic images created by two poets from different cultures.

A comparative examination between the two women poets and their poetry reveals more similarities between H.D. and Chen. In the 1980s, the movement for the resurrection of Hilda Doolittle in American modernist literature achieved new heights boosted by the celebration of her centennial in the 1980s in America; at the same time, Chen Jingrong, a Chinese female poet and her works, were reintroduced corresponding to the cultural renaissance in the post-Mao era in China. Coincidentally, both poets are called "Sappho" by their critics, after the name of the ancient Greek female poet. Moreover, they share similar life experiences, living exile lives, both as women and professional poets. Another similarity may be more than a coincidence: there are recurring images of estranged conventionalised beautiful objects created to form the concept of beauty in their early lyric poetry written in wartime.<sup>1</sup> However, there is no evidence of either poet having had a direct influence on the other. This suggests that there is more to the meaning underlying these poetic images than their literary and poetic significance. Therefore, the transnational comparative reading urged me to move the focal point shifting from the attention to individual poems and poets to the consideration of their social-cultural conditions, with an aim to reveal the deeper cultural motives that go beyond the limits of a given language and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> H.D.'s writing will be situated in the Great War (1914-1918), England and Chen in the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), China.

Given the similarities identified above, I assume that the poetic image of beauty in both poets' work is created as the poets' responses to their living situations. In other words, the poetic image reflects the relationship between the poets' female bodies and the external world. In this sense, the poets do not exist prior to their poetic images or the other way around. In other words, the poetic image is neither a result of language nor a register of an idea or a concept. My assumption is that the poetic text is the code of a conversation between the two poets and their eras. The investigation of the similar idea of beauty in both H.D. and Chen's poetry, therefore, is required to be contextualised in the specific social-historical situation in which the two poets lived. In this sense, my study is to some degree retrospective because I take interest in examining how these poetic images take their forms. My aim is to investigate a process of literary production in the specific social-cultural context of modernism. In this respect, my study, rather than being descriptive, demonstrates its theoretical concern. As a study focusing on the process of literary production, this thesis resists prescribed categorisation and carefully examines the interaction between language and the poets' living situations. I assume that gender as an important condition of the two poets' existence plays a primary role in their understanding of the external world. Intrigued by the underlying dialectic between the poetic images created by both poets and their living situations, I unfold the journey of the two poets' brave quests for beauty in their poetic careers. In doing so, I reveal that their pursuits of a new female-centred concept of beauty, despite in different cultures, both responded aesthetically and discursively to the context of modernism.

### Two Sapphos and the Poetry of 'New Beauty'

My inquiry into the dialectic between H.D. and Chen's new aesthetic and its relation to modernism begins with their sharing the honorary title: Sappho. These two women poets are so named Sappho because of their highly praised poetic techniques of crafting clear images of nature and their gender as females. By questioning the existing polarised reading of their poetic images in their early lyrical poetry, I propose a new approach to unpack the poetic image of 'new beauty' to reveal the dialectic between aesthetics and politics in its signification by examining the poetic estrangement in both formalist and discursive ways.

Hilda Doolittle is the so-called American Sappho, a poet widely known for her brilliant poetic techniques of crafting concise and powerful images and her association with the early twentieth century avant-garde Imagist group. She published her poetry under the pen name "H.D.". Because "H.D." is the name preferred by the poet herself<sup>2</sup> and marks her poetic inauguration and lifetime achievements in poetry, this thesis will use the name "H.D." to address her. Although her oeuvre spans five decades of the twentieth century and encompasses a variety of genres, H.D. is known primarily as a poet who admired the ancient Greek aesthetic. Her archaistic poetic practice and her own interest in Sappho's poetry thus gained her the title of "American Sappho".

Chen Jingrong (1917-1989) is the so-called "Chinese Sappho", a Chinese poet known for being a member of the modern Chinese poetry school "Nine-Leaves"<sup>3</sup>, writing poetry and literary criticism mainly in the 1940s in China. I address her as Chen by her surname throughout this thesis and others who share the same surname with her are addressed in their full name. Like H.D., she also has a long poetic career spanning fifty-years'.<sup>4</sup> Compared with

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<sup>2</sup> Amy Lowell, who was one of her friends and the patron of post-Pound Imagism, notes the poet's own preference for the name "H.D." in her book *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* published in 1917 (252).

<sup>3</sup> The "Nine-Leaves" is a group of poets rediscovered in 1980s China, who were writing modernist poetry in the 1940s in China.

<sup>4</sup> Apart from writing poetry, Chen is also a renowned literature translator. Her widely circulated translating works encompass *Flowers of Evil* (*Les Fleurs du mal*), the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, and *Notre Dame de Paris*, the romantic novel of Victor Hugo.

H.D., whose identification with Sappho is largely based on her poetic style and her own homage to the latter, Chen's title of Sappho is more figurative. Chen is called Sappho by her contemporary critic and friend Tang Shi in his poem "The Journey of Illusory Beauty", written in the 1970s. He comments how Chen's poetic language is "as clear and transparent as ripples on a stream" and "as crystal and shining as a drop of dew" in a critical essay titled "The Serious Stars" ("Yansu de Xingchen") (20). Tang's comments suggest that the name Sappho refers to the deep Western poetic influence on Chen and her incorporation of this influence into her own poetry.

The Sapphic implications thus encourage two polarised tendencies in the studies of the images in their early poetry: formalist studies and gender studies. The formalist studies focus on language appropriation in crafting images and its connection with each writer's individual cultural tradition. This type of study has a long history accompanying the emergence of their poetry, including Amy Lowell's reading of H.D.'s poems in *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917), Eileen Gregory's *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines* (1997), Chen Li's "The Separation and Interrogation between Human and Nature: The 'Root' in Chen Jingrong's Poetry" ("Ren yu Ziran de Fenlie yu Tongyi: Chen Jingrong Shige de Genxing Jiedu") (2009)—to name a few. The gender studies approach, as with the development of feminism, engages with gender problems implicated by the writers' poetic images. Thus, the focus of these studies is the implicit metaphorical meanings and their explicit significance in gender politics. To name a few: Cassandra Laity's "H.D.'s Romantic Landscapes: The Sexual Politics of the Garden" (1990), Donna Hollenberg's *H.D.: The Poetics of Childbirth and Creativity* (1991), Renée Curry's *White Women Writing White: H.D., Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, and Whiteness* (1999), and Meng Liansu's *The Inferno Tango: Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917–1980* (2010). The first type, appearing as early as the publication of the poetry, with a formalist and literary-historical

scope, reveals the writers' aesthetic values and helps to establish their poetic fame. The second type, using a social-cultural approach, fostered by the second wave of feminism, uncovers their appeals as women and rediscovers the gender-political aspirations in their poetry.

The two paradigms become problematic when they are applied to explain the production of meanings, because they treat poetry as a finished object. As static approaches, they fixed the meanings within either linguistic forms or subject-matter. Accordingly, the poetic images are removed from either their social-historical context or poetic context (poetic structure, for example). In other words, they neglect the dialectic between the aesthetic and the political in their poetry.

This neglect overlooks the significance of a series of H.D. and Chen's early lyrical poems written during war. In 1916, H.D. published her first collection of poems, *Sea Garden*, in London, two years after she debuted in transatlantic poetic society. This collection of poetry, including her important Imagist poems from 1912 to 1916, gained a reputation for her in the transatlantic circle and drew both critical and public attention to her work. In *Sea Garden*, H.D. repeatedly depicts unusual pictures of flowers and praises their distinctive beauty in six poems. They are "Sea Rose", "Sea Lily", "Sea Poppies", "Sea Violet", "Sea Iris" and "Sheltered Garden". In "Sheltered Garden", she proposes a phrase to describe these wind-attacked places and flowers as "new beauty". Similarly, Chen presents recurring powerful images of shivering in her poems written in 1945, collected in her first poetry collection *Overflow (Yingying Ji)* (1948).<sup>5</sup> She uses these images as an alternative form of

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<sup>5</sup> *Overflow*, published in November 1948, includes her poems written during the time from 1935 to 1945. Although its publication is six-months later than another poetry collection *The Symphony (Jiaoxiang Ji)*, *Overflow* is widely considered as the first collection of Chen's poetry, because it contains Chen's early poems and the compiling and editing work was completed as early as 1946. According to Chen Li, it was financial problems that delayed its publication. See the details in Chen Li's "The Chronology of Chen Jingrong and her work" collected in *The Collected Poems and Essays of Chen Jingrong (Chen Jingrong Shiwen Ji)* (2008).

beauty to that represented by flowers. In terms of both poets' vision, these beautiful objects, unlike a conventionalised impression, are wild and strong with a deformed appearance whereby beauty is generated in and through confrontation. At this point, the imagery of beauty in both H.D. and Chen's poetry shares characteristics. In this sense, I adopt the phrase "new beauty" invented by H.D. to refer to both poets' newly created images of beauty and term this new notion of beauty as 'new beauty'. The collective of the poems containing the images of 'new beauty' correspondingly is *the poetry of 'new beauty'*.

This correlation between these two poets' writing and their struggle for poetic and personal independence calls the existing polarised research paradigms into question and urges a reconsideration of poetic images. Two recent efforts by scholars signal a new and balanced direction by revealing the creative power of images. H.D. scholar Celena Kusch suggests a contextualised study of the images in H.D.'s early poetry by reflecting on the arguments which set H.D.'s imagist poetry outside of the contemporary world in "H.D.'s American 'Sea Garden': Drowning the Idyll Threat to US Modernism" (2010). In her work, she reveals the relationship between the emergence of the poetic images of landscape in *Sea Garden* and the poet's American experience. Jeanne Hong Zhang (Zhang Xiaohong) provides a discursive method for bridging the gap between the aesthetic approach and gender studies in *The Invention of a Discourse: Women's Poetry from Contemporary China* (2004). She defines women's poetry as female-authored texts that deal with gender-based experience and psychology through a distinctive language usage (16). Based on this definition, she successfully addresses the question of how gender is inscribed in language in contemporary Chinese women's poetry. Zhang's work thus links poetic form to women poets' gendered experience. These two studies suggest a contextualising reading of poetic images which can be insightfully related to the construction of the poet's experience. Both studies indicate that any political intention, nationalist or gender-driven inscribed in these images, is based on the

development of the poet's self-consciousness in the dynamic between poetic and social practice rather than being prescribed in their national and gender identity. In this sense, both the poetic form of an image and the meanings of the image are historical and constructive; in other words, the dialectic between the aesthetic and the political is at work during the process of creating images.

In light of the paradigmatic questions raised respectively by Kusch and Zhang, I rest my fundamental argument on investigating the production of the poetic images of 'new beauty'. I contest the two assumptions of poetic images in the problematic paradigms in question and argue that the poetic image is neither merely the linguistic-based artistic representation of natural objects nor the linguistic sign of abstract ideas. My approach, therefore, is to unpack the images of 'new beauty' by returning to the signifying process to reveal the dialectic between aesthetics and politics in producing meanings. In my study, the creation of 'new beauty' imagery is realised by linguistic violation, the so-called *estrangement* (originally "*ostranenie*" in Russian). My investigation develops by revolving around the aesthetic and discursive power of this term. I begin my inquiry of poetic estrangement with Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky's assumption of the linguistic transformation in creating poetic images, which inaugurates the study of the poetic estrangement in a modern way. In "Art as Device" (1917), Shklovsky divides the usage of images in a poem into two types: disposition and creation. The real poetic image, according to this division, is regarded as the latter (4). Shklovsky's theory suggests that appropriating a certain linguistic sign to forge a poetic image aims to produce new meanings derived from individual perception rather than retaining its prescribed literary or implied meanings within a poetic or everyday convention. In this sense, a poetic image contains not only the information of the selected external objects but also the poet's subjective reaction to them. In other words, Shklovsky's theory of estrangement reveals the presence of the body of the poet who is the

perceiving subject within linguistic form. However, the theory of Shklovsky and other formalist theories has its limits because they take estrangement as an aesthetic effect out of its social-historical situations. Accordingly, I further my inquiry by applying the poetic language of Julia Kristeva and the theories and methodology of Discourse Studies which provides insights into the relationship between the form of language and its social-cultural values<sup>6</sup>. These theories shed light on how the body of the poet engages with the social context and language. At this point, they will reveal that the perceiving subject becomes an articulating position in poetry which produces a revolutionary discourse. In this thesis, this theoretical framework is applied to explain how the feminist discourse of ‘new beauty’ is formed by the interaction between the two poets’ female bodies and their living situations.

In this thesis, I contextualise the revolutionary poetry of ‘new beauty’ within these two poets’ early poetic careers, the period between the beginning of their poetry publication and the end of the wars which they respectively experienced. This chronological inquiry suggests a strong dialectic between their writing and their personal struggle and persistence during this turbulent time. For this reason, I argue that the emergence of the poetry of ‘new beauty’, as a turning point, not only signals a significant shift of their poetic pursuit but also announces their poetic and personal autonomy, the formation of a female-centred standpoint.

The life of both H.D. and Chen is a journey of a quest for new ways of speaking. Writing poetry, for H.D. and Chen, as for many other modernists, is a way to search for new meanings. Their poetry is inscribed with the two women poets’ brave quest for their personal independence and poetic autonomy. In order to search for meanings for themselves, they lead

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<sup>6</sup> In *Introduction to Discourse Studies* (2004), Jan Renkema focusing on a social-linguistic perspective defines Discourse Studies as a discipline devoted to the investigation of the relationship between form and function in verbal communication. In *Discourse Studies Reader: Main currents in theory and analysis* (2014), the editors give a broader definition and claim that it is a new field of research revolving around the concept of discourse emerging from the 1960s, which is beyond a trans-disciplinary or even post-disciplinary project.



drifting lives on borderline, which is called “self-imposed exile” by Susan Friedman.<sup>7</sup> In *The American H.D.* (2012), Annette Debo describes H.D.’s life of drifting like this: “While not homeless, H.D. was placeless, living in a succession of flats, hotels, and clinics, as well as Bryher’s Swiss home, Kenwin” (4). Similarly, Chen led a drifting life during her early years. She once remarked: “Only except once or twice, I have lived in one room for no more than six months” (“Moving Home” (“Qianju”) 674). These descriptions reveal that these two women poets lived in a drifting way which symbolises their life of quest for meaning and freedom.

However, exile for H.D. and Chen means not only resistance to living in a fixed place but also to being institutionalised within a patriarchal family. The conflict between the wakening of their self-consciousness and their parental families’ patriarchal controls initiated their self-imposed exile. Born within the gentry of their own societies, H.D. and Chen were provided with a relatively comfortable material life and, more importantly, good education. H.D.’s childhood began on Church Street in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in the Moravian community in which her mother’s family had been influential. H.D.’s father was a professor of astronomy at Lehigh University and later became a professor of astronomy at the University of Pennsylvania and director of the Flower Observatory in Upper Darby, near Philadelphia. Because of her father’s new position, the Doolittle family moved to Upper Darby and became integrated into a different world, one dominated by the upper-middle-class conventions of university life and society. Chen was born in Leshan, a small but noted historic town in southwestern China, Sichuan Province. Chen’s family belonged to the land-owner class in Chinese society. Her grandfather had a *xiucai* degree, a scholar-gentleman

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<sup>7</sup> Friedman views this self-imposed exile as a flight from home, a significant feature of modernism. See details in the essay “Exile in the American Grain: H.D.’s Diaspora” in vol. 25, No. 3-4, *Agenda*, 1987. pp. 27-50.

who passed the imperial examination at the county level<sup>8</sup>, and her father was a middle-class military officer. Both families, governed by dominant social values, imposed rigid social constraints on the two poets. In order to search for opportunities to make themselves heard, they left their homes. H.D. lived as an expatriate in England and Europe from 1911 until her death in 1961; Chen's footprint eventually covered almost half of China, from north to south, from east to west.

The self-marginalisation from their safe social systems brings the poets to the borderline where they witnessed a rapidly changing world which at the beginning, left them dazzled and anxious. In order to see their own situations more clearly, they escaped from all domestic constrictions that would confine them to any subordinate role other than that of a poet. In a letter written to her friend and contemporary poet Marianne Moore in 1921, H.D. claimed: "I can't write, unless I am an outcast" (qtd. in Friedman "Exile in American Grain" 27). In the essay "Moving Home", Chen showed her dislike of the idea of being settled. She claimed that living in a fixed or permanent place, a "nest" or a "home", means futility (675). She stated that only the bird with weak wings needs a nest and the individual who is less determined requires a home. The drifting life for both poets, who resist settling and domestication, suggests their resistance to the institutionalisation of their bodies and to the fixation of meanings and values in a prescribed world. Locating my inquiry in this context, I argue that both poets' writing of 'new beauty' poetry is one of such explorations during their life time and significantly, it establishes a new starting point for their quest from a female-centred stand point. During this process, they searched for freedom and a new language to build up their own voices with which they could adequately express their views of the world. After establishing the poetry of 'new beauty', these two poets sailed out to build up more

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<sup>8</sup> Educated by Confucian canons, local scholar-gentry, among other social duties, preached Confucian moral teachings in the villages or towns and claimed to represent Confucian morality and virtue.

powerful poetic monuments. H.D. engaged with a more compelling and deeper agenda, such as revealing more combative feminist attitudes in her scheme of revising myths.

Concurrently, Chen turned to criticising with confidence the mechanical and indifferent modern metropolis in her poetry.

This brief biographical survey reveals the causality between the poets' living experiences and their poetics: writing the poetry of 'new beauty' is a signifying practice, a poetic reflection on their situations. In terms of Julia Kristeva's theory, the estrangement in language produces a subject position based on a concrete relationship between the body and its surroundings. As Anna Smith suggests in her book *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement* (1996), the exile of language corresponds to the unsettled subject (5).

Kristevan theory, at this point, moves the thinking of poetic estrangement beyond Shklovsky's formulation of poetic estrangement, as the reflection of perception in language, to a deeper understanding that it reflects a subject who draws the boundaries and defines the nature of her existence within and through language. In this sense, poetic estrangement reveals that the perceiving subject's understanding of the external world is not only reflexive but also reflective.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, poetry provides representations of not only the object that is perceived but more importantly, how the poet understands it and from what particular stance. Poetry thus becomes a narrative of the subject's 'real' conditions of existence. Moreover, this understanding is not a neutral one but imposed by the social and historical context. This narrative (or articulation) becomes a discourse which inevitably negotiates with and against, social consensus. By this means, my thesis suggests the political power implicit in the aesthetic function of language and the theories of discourse help to demonstrate this dialectic between language appropriation and power-relations in society.

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<sup>9</sup> Although Shklovsky mentions "thinking" in images, his attitude to the concept of "thinking" is ambivalent, when his focal point is the relationship between sensation and the transformation of language.

My inquiry into the establishment of a female subject position begins with the inauguration of H.D. and Chen's poetic life. Following the thread of politics in poetic language, I demonstrate how a female-centred perspective comes into existence through a direct relationship between the female body of these two poets and the external world they encountered. Writing from a female body freed from the close male authorities in their lives, the poetry of 'new beauty' is undoubtedly a female-centred discourse, articulating the understanding of the external world from a female body.

The other thread of this thesis is the investigation of the meanings that are produced by the images of 'new beauty', through which I reveal the aesthetic and its political implications. Given the occurrence of their poetic shift and the inauguration of these poets' independence in writing poetry and in their personal life, I argue that the 'new beauty' that contests the objectification of beauty in a dualistic tradition is the new aesthetic proposed by H.D. and Chen which announces their struggle to articulate a female subject-position(s). On this basis, I argue for the importance of the poetry of 'new beauty' for revealing the dialectic between aesthetics and politics in women poets' work. In this sense, I contend that the concept of 'new beauty' on the one hand is an aesthetic innovation and on the other has gender-political implications. The investigation of the 'new beauty' images in both poets' poetry thus returns the poets to their specific historical-cultural context, the context of modernism.

This investigation relates the poetry of 'new beauty' to these poets' aesthetic and poetic propositions and places it in a wider cultural context beyond their personal situations, namely the war-time cultural environment. The Great War (1914-1918) and the "War of Resistance Against Japan" (1937-1945)<sup>10</sup> respectively resulted in the radical social changes

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<sup>10</sup> "War of Resistance Against Japan", also known as The Second Sino-Japanese War. it was generally agreed that the War of Resistance did not officially begin until July 7, 1937 after Japanese troops attacked the Marco

and the perception of fragmentation to the extreme in both English and Chinese societies. In both cultures, artistic experimentation, having experienced a pre-war prosperity then fell into crisis. Because of this, I argue that the poetry of ‘new beauty’, besides being an outcome of personal struggle for poetic independence, is the poetic answer to a more important social agenda, the requirement of a new aesthetic and social order. These two poets’ body-based poetics and a proposition of a new concept of beauty which is the path to ‘reality’ link their poetic praxis based on poetic estrangement to a demonstration of a new aesthetic concept of beauty. In this sense, I view the images of ‘new beauty’ as a *new judgment* of beauty.

A Kantian formulation of the judgment of beauty, viewing it as a bodily and contextualised construct, informs this investigation. As Roger Scruton suggests in his *Beauty* (2008), beauty is not about “things in the world” but about “a particular experience of them, and about the pursuit of meaning that springs from that experience” (108). This treatment centres this thesis on beauty and its construction, taking both *new* and *beauty* into account. In *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Immanuel Kant formulates the act of the judgment of beauty as a society-oriented aesthetic practice through contemplation one that reflects the relationship between the judging subject and the external objects. Kantian formulation reveals the political power underlying its aesthetic function. The dialectic in the judgment of beauty attests to its aesthetic and political power, a recognition that re-enters Kantian studies in the twenty-first century. Tobin Siebers does the ground-breaking work and calls for a reconsideration of the revolutionary power of the Kantian concept of beauty in his essay “Kant and the Politics of Beauty” (1998). Another important indicator of this is the new translation of the third Critique of Kant by Paul Guyer in 2000. In this translation, Guyer

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Polo Bridge outside Beijing in what is referred to as the “Marco Polo Bridge Incident” (Lugouqiao shibian) or the “July 7 Incident” (Qi qi shibian). In 2017, the Chinese Ministry of Education officially issued an instructive stating that Chinese textbooks were to refer to the war as the Fourteen-Year’s War of Resistance, which re-dates the beginning of the war on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1931, when Manchuria was occupied by Japanese military troops. This study only contextualises Chen’s writing of ‘new beauty’ in the outbreak of full-scale war.

makes a significant change in the English title from “Critique of Judgment” to “Critique of the Power of Judgment”. Moreover, he publishes a collection of his critical essays on aesthetics, *Values of Beauty*, in 2005. Both titles coined by Guyer reveal a similar emphasis. The judgment of beauty, in Kantian thought, thus has discursive power, because it connects individual experience and social order. In this sense, the Kantian theory of beauty reveals both the aesthetic values of beauty and its political power and implies that a discourse of beauty can be both aesthetic and political. The personal independence of these two poets prepared a free judging subject of beauty and this subjective judgment enters language by taking the subject-position which is prepared by the exploration of poetic estrangement; hence, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ is a discourse of beauty from a female-centred view.

Taking the poetry in question as a discourse of beauty reveals that this new discourse contests a modernised dualistic aesthetic tradition based on a Burke-Kantian formulation. One of the distinctive features which marks the modernisation of aesthetics in Western philosophy is the emergence of the beauty-sublimity duality in the eighteenth century. The Burke-Kantian theory considers the concept of beauty as morally inferior for its passivity. Although it facilitates aesthetic studies, this division forms a paradigmatic understanding of beauty as a tradition (which I term *conventionalised beauty*), in which beauty is a static concept not as important as sublimity. This division has had an impact on the formation of modern aesthetics not only in the Western but also Chinese context. Modern feminist study reveals that this dualistic aesthetic tradition is built up from a male-centred view based on a masculinity/femininity dualism. In this sense, the discourse formed by the poetry of ‘new beauty’ which creates beautiful objects with the impression of being powerful by breaking the link between femininity and beauty is a female-centred discourse whereby women may be empowered. And in order for their empowerment to proceed, what is required hinges on the poetic estrangement produced through the process of creating images of ‘new beauty’. By

examining the aesthetic concept and its political power, the conflict between the subject's narrative and the social consensus in the poetry of 'new beauty' is demonstrated by the revision of the vocabulary of beauty formulated in the dualistic aesthetic tradition. In this respect, I argue that the poetry of 'new beauty', as representative of one of many female voices forms a mode of feminist discourse that reflects on and responds to the context of modernism.

H.D. and Chen's poetry of 'new beauty' as their significant war-time achievement is to some degree concealed by the critical discourse established after war.<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, female-centred aesthetics and its gender political implications are sealed within the newly established masculine order and feminist efforts are buried. Although these poets and writers re-enter the purview of literary scholars, their aesthetic attempts are to some extent overlooked. For example, in the introduction to *Female Beauty in Art* (2014), Maria Ioannou claims that the female-perspective aesthetic practice emerges from the third wave of the feminist movement. As an example of the study of Chinese literature, Zhang Xiaohong begins her inquiry of Chinese women's poetry from the 1980s. Because of this, my study takes a post-modern and post-feminist stance and aims to rediscover the feminist attempts made by modernist women poets and revalue them retrospectively.

### The Transnational Perspective and Commensurability in Terminology

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent B. Sherry elucidates the pre-war tradition broke down and a new order established after the war in English society in *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003). This phenomenon in Chinese society is noted in Carolyn FitzGerald's *Fragmenting Modernisms: Chinese Wartime Literature, Art, and Film, 1937-49* (2014).

In this thesis, a post-modern and post-feminist stance suggests a transnational perspective as a response to *globalisation*, lifting out the poetry of ‘new beauty’ written by H.D. and Chen from their local contexts and reconsidering it within a global context.<sup>12</sup> In terms of Paul Jay’s formulation, I take globalisation firstly as a historical process propelled by international communication driven by the development of economy and technology and secondly as the key feature of post-modernity, the condition of society we encounter today.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, globalisation on the one hand makes a cross-cultural scope imperative and on the other hand establishes the foundation of the commensurability in the working terminology of this thesis, namely the applicability of the terms of aesthetics, modernism and beauty in both Western and Chinese contexts.

Economic and cultural globalisation complicates contemporary literary studies and accelerates the field of transnational literary studies. In *Global Matters* (2010), Jay outlines a gradual collapse of the universality that has underpinned traditional Western literary studies since the 1960s. By criticising the hypocrisy implicit in the Arnoldian model of literary study, he points out that colonialist theories promote a one-sided Western thinking system as universal; however, deconstruction questions this universality by dismantling the sameness and singularity of meaning while various post-colonialist theories question it by emphasising the political implication at work in the West/East duality and celebrating differences and diversity in different cultures (18-22). The effort of the deconstructionists and post-colonialists testifies to the presumption of a universal model of thought based on the Western tradition. Postcolonial studies, in Jay’s view, thus undermine the Eurocentricity of literary

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<sup>12</sup> The call for transnational practice on feminist literary criticism in post-modernity firstly appears in Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan’s book *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (1994).

<sup>13</sup> According to Jay, in post-modernity we see the collapse of boundaries and borders accelerated by mechanisation and technology, especially the new technology of electronic forms of communication, which “allows for nearly instantaneous contact and for commercial transactions that cover the globe while virtually ignoring nation-state boundaries” (37). See Jay’s further explanation on this matter in *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (2010).



studies and historicise the European literary tradition. In this sense, post-colonial studies can be seen to have transformed traditional critical discourse, replacing a unitary, ahistorical, and universalising model for literary studies with a model focused on difference and diversity.

This cultural multiplicity and diversity, complicated by globalisation, raises a new question: where is the future of literary studies, if the validity of the concepts and definitions is questioned as historical and cultural constructs? To address this question, Jay posits a post-postcolonial stage of literary studies, a shift from post-colonial to a global perspective, a stage of *cultural hybridity*. Although this shift is a “new kind of fragmentation”, Jay believes that the breaking down of the discipline’s coherence in the Eurocentric framework is not the end but will be replaced by a new form of coherence according to how it evolves (29-30). In “Vanishing Horizons: Problems in the Comparison of China and the West” (2017), Eric Hayot responds to this question by emphasising the theoretical and epistemological function of comparative study. He argues that

any comparison is, inevitably, not just a comparison of two things that pre-exist the comparison, but itself an attempt (conscious or unconscious) to determine their natures, to solidify their outlines, to locate them in some social, political, or historical space: in short, to know them through the act of comparison. (88)

The recognition of differences and similarities is not the end of literary studies as such, but the starting point of a further academic adventure. Thus, Jay’s transnational theory reflects the new exploration of coherence in the context of globalisation from a transnational perspective.

In this sense, my study takes a transnational perspective; however, joining two women poets from different cultures inevitably involves a cross-cultural comparison, which makes commensurability in the working terminology a primary problem to address. The cross-

cultural comparison here inextricably encounters a distinction between the West and China. The question of terminological commensurability in my study is whether the terminology in use, mainly *aesthetics*, *modernism* and *beauty*, are legitimate categories in a Chinese context and to what extent they might function as such. Given the geographic and political implications in the West/East formula, it is necessary to distinguish between commensurability of terminology and the illusionary universality of a Western model. Here I take commensurability to be the basis of establishing arguments for academic purposes, while the universality of one type of knowledge or paradigm inevitably implies the exercise of discursive power. As Jay observes, to establish a commensurability of working terminology as a foundation of transnational studies is not to privilege one model over the rest, but to establish a starting point for this new exploratory process. Transforming the traditional definition of nation and dismissing the border, globalisation suggests that the new coherence is at a vanishing point beyond the West/East duality. In this sense, it establishes terminological commensurability through chiefly focusing on the positive role played by the Western model in providing an enlightening and efficient methodology for Chinese modernity.

Taking a transnational perspective, I rest the terminological commensurability in this study on two preconditions. Firstly, my understanding and use of the terminology takes its stance in a post-modern global context and builds on the growing disciplines of transnational, cross-cultural and modernist studies. These existing critical and scholarly practices theoretically and paradigmatically testify to a globalising usage of terminology in a post-postcolonial academic context. By pluralising the terminology, they emphasise that difference exists in context rather than in terminology *per se*. Secondly, a historical context attests to the commensurability in the working terminology of my study. In the process of Chinese modernisation, we can see an academic modernisation in China within a globalised context.

During this process, Western theories and concepts were introduced in China and Chinese local experiences were abstracted and subsumed under Western terminology. Modern Chinese culture, along with Chinese society, currently exists in a hybrid state shaped by the encounter and conversations between modern Western culture and Chinese traditional culture.<sup>14</sup> As Hayot emphasises, the hybridity in Chinese culture is due to the varying political, economic and cultural communication between the West and China during Chinese modernisation (96). Modernity, or modernisation, based on the Western model was considered as new forms of social and economic development when China saw the power of Western countries. Motivated by idealism and nationalism, Western technology, ideas about political systems, philosophy and literature are imported to Chinese society through translation. In this conversation, the discourse of the West/East duality reflects the opposition between liberalism and conservatism in the Chinese context.<sup>15</sup> During this process, Chinese traditional experiences are re-institutionalised within a Western framework and the newly generated modern experience is accommodated in the form of Western models.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, Chen's writing of the poetry of 'new beauty', like other modern forms of praxis in Chinese context, is the product of globalisation, a conversation with the Western model of knowledge. In particular, Chen as a translator plays an active role in promoting Western culture in Chinese society. In this sense, rather than resisting it, Chen embraces Western culture in her practice.

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<sup>14</sup> Wang Ning defines modernity in the mainland Chinese context as an open, developing, and democratic concept closely related to China's economic, political, cultural, and literary modernisation and post-modernisation in his essay "Translating Modernity and Reconstructing World Literature" (2012).

<sup>15</sup> Scholars, such as Qian Zhaoming in his *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (1995) and Shu-mei Shih in *The Lure of The Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*, insist on the particularity of the modernisation in the Chinese context, which does not entirely conform to Said's post-colonial theory.

<sup>16</sup> Western modern thought, in this light, is considered as an advanced model, while Chinese traditional philosophy is thought to be outdated in a radical revolutionary view since the New Cultural Movement in 1917.

Through this transnational study which focuses on the dialectic between aesthetics and gender politics, I present here a much more integrated approach that seeks to overcome the centre/periphery duality. This thesis creates a balanced methodology. As an interdisciplinary inquiry crossing the boundary of poetics, aesthetics and cultural criticism, it both resists a traditional formalist perspective that confines literary criticism to a statically formal text, and equally avoids a fashionable inclusive cultural-political criticism which risks denying criticism's aesthetic evaluating function. This thesis also assigns equal weight to both H.D. and Chen and treats them as artists on a similar path by way of cross-reference. In so doing, this thesis avoids the traditional political concerns of recreating a West/East duality, because geopolitical fences are removed through the process of cross-referencing. In other words, this thesis is centred on neither Western nor Chinese culture, but rests its argument on the conversation between them. To some extent, it avoids an 'archaeological' study of images and concepts within one tradition and formulates a cross-cultural approach that configures a model of women poets' exploration and creativity in the context of modernism. The juxtaposition of H.D. and Chen's poetry thus moves beyond other possible impacts imposed by their local context to foreground the dialectic between aesthetics and gender politics.

### Outline of This Thesis

Revolving around the examination of poetic estrangement in images of 'new beauty' in the context of modernism, my study aims to link the poets' body-based poetics to their aesthetic pursuit of *powerful* beauty. I reveal that the female-centred judgment of beauty is articulated through the poetry of 'new beauty' by taking the female subject position formed by such estrangement. I, therefore, propose the so-called 'new beauty' as a new aesthetic

concept, responding to modernism from a female-centred point of view, that revises conventionalised beauty within a dualistic aesthetic tradition and thus redefines women in a discursive sense. Through the examination of the poetic image of ‘new beauty’, I plan to firstly unfold the construction of a mode of feminist discourse which recasts the relationship between an *I* and the external world and secondly reveal its revolutionary power in society by examining its negotiation with the dominant masculinist discourse.

To achieve this goal, I provide a new scope for viewing the images of ‘new beauty’ in Chapter One by contesting the paradigmatic understanding of them and place them under scrutiny within three interacting theoretical frameworks: the theory of the judgment of beauty, of poetic language and of modernism.

In Chapter Two, I return to the beginning of the signification of the images of ‘new beauty’ by contextualising the writing of the poetry of ‘new beauty’ in the two poets’ early self-imposed exile lives. In this chapter, I begin my argument with exposing the problematic relationship between women and the external world. I argue that the contradiction between their free articulation as women and the social constraints on their bodies causes these two poets’ anxiety over their writing. After the completion of *three escapes* from the authority of fathers, mentors and husbands, the two poets gain poetic and personal autonomy and independence. Free from the screen made by patriarchal authority, they position their bodies directly towards the external world. In other words, this place is a starting point for them to see the world and themselves from a female-centred perspective and also the starting point for them to present the poetry of ‘new beauty’.

In Chapter Three, I argue that the experience of the free-lived body enters the poetry of ‘new beauty’ by poetic estrangement to form a discourse of beauty from a female-centred perspective, based on the theory of Shklovsky and Kristeva. I take a formalist examination of

the images of ‘new beauty’ in both diachronic and synchronic ways and demonstrate that they are estranged from conventionalised images of beauty. I then argue that these two poets create radically different images of ‘new beauty’ to present a harsh aesthetic.

In Chapter Four, I examine the negotiation between the discourse of ‘new beauty’ and the dominant discourse of beauty that is based on a dualistic aesthetic tradition by connecting H.D. and Chen’s creation of the images of ‘new beauty’ to their body-based poetics and aesthetic pursuits of beauty in modernism. I contend that the concept of ‘new beauty’ revises traditional dualistic aesthetics by redefining its vocabulary. This revision, as I will argue, is an aesthetic response to the context of modernist aesthetic innovation realised by a shift of position in relation to gender. In this sense, the concept of ‘new beauty’ presents a female-centred aesthetics whereby beauty becomes empowered.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the gender implications in the dualistic aesthetic traditions. I demonstrate that female-centred aesthetics are realised by breaking the masculine formulation of masculinity/femininity dualism through poetic estrangement. The empowerment of beauty, in this sense, empowers women. The images of ‘new beauty’ symbolise women’s transcendence, a mode of existence by which women extend the boundaries of their lives and posit themselves towards the future. Through this empowerment, women reclaim their agency and assume a subject position in social activity, equal to men. They can be perceiving subjects, aesthetic judging subjects and articulating subjects which are manifested by poetic estrangement in the poetry of ‘new beauty’. In this sense, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ is a feminist discourse against the dominating masculine one. I further argue that this discourse responds to the rise and growth of the “New Woman” as a social group in the context of modernism.

## Chapter One: The Poetry of 'New Beauty': An Aesthetic Judgment, A Poetic Language and A Discourse

Beauty is an elusive, wide-ranging concept. To set a baseline for this thesis, this chapter aims to define the poetry and the term of 'new beauty' in three dimensions related to the engagement of H.D. and Chen's female bodies: first, by distinguishing conventionalised beauty within a dualistic tradition and the 'new beauty' as a concept created by the poets; second, by examining the poetic estrangement in creating these images representing it; and thirdly, through treating modernism as the aesthetic and social-historical context for its emergence. In so doing, this chapter reveals the poetry of 'new beauty' as a new judgment of beauty that reflects the dialectic between aesthetics and politics through the process of poetic estrangement.

### 1.1 Paradigmatic Beauty and Its Problems

This thesis is a response to the misreading of the so-called images of 'new beauty' in H.D. and Chen's poetry. Furthermore, I contend that these images as they appear in the early lyric poetry of both H.D. and Chen have not been sufficiently studied. The critics neglect the notion of 'new beauty' as a new concept of beauty represented by these images. I discover that this misreading and neglect are caused by a paradigmatic understanding of beauty within a modernised dualistic aesthetics. This misreading, as I argue, conceals the two poets' aesthetic and discursive innovation.

One aspect of the misconception is to treat the 'new beauty' as a transcendental concept, thereby attaching it to existing aesthetic traditions. The theme of beauty, as it recurs

in H.D.'s poetry, is widely recognised as a significant factor in her poetry, however, it has not been exhaustively interpreted. As early as 1917 Amy Lowell, the patron and critic of Imagism, observed the term 'new beauty' as being a distinctive feature of H.D.'s *Sea Garden* in *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*. However, Lowell views the term, along with other expressions of beauty by H.D., as a revival of ancient Greek aesthetics, displaying a concise, recognisable poetic form. Yet she feels puzzled by the disharmony indicated by the images of beauty in "Sheltered Garden". In order to meet the Greek notion of beauty as harmony, "Sheltered Garden" with the bizarre use of "new beauty" is treated as an exception by Lowell, which is "a cry for rest and disorder" due to the weariness caused by the intensive crafting of a delicate 'new beauty' (261). In contrast, I argue that Lowell's reading fails to see the radical coinage of 'new beauty', which inevitably obstructs her understanding of its meaning. Although she was aware that H.D.'s conception of beauty was a sharp and painful thing she nevertheless ignores these attributes and takes the former as a feature that makes the poetry an "art of balance, of repose, of mellowness and charm" (261). This contradiction remains in Michael Kaufmann's recent reading in "Gendering Modernism: H.D., Imagism and Masculinist Aesthetics" (1997). On the one hand, he points out that H.D.'s flowers in *Sea Garden* are not for representing beauty but for other qualities such as endurance, persistence, and strength. On the other, he aligns them with the harsh beauty of survival, obviously different from a conventional prettiness (62-63). Clearly, the features of 'new beauty' in H.D.'s poetics have placed the critics in a dilemma, their ambivalent treatment suggesting that the attempt to categorise H.D.'s 'new beauty' as simply belonging to existing concepts is misguided.

In Chen's case, the problem is similar, although it is less complicated, in that the conception of beauty in her poetry has not received sufficient attention. A few comments can be found scattered among readings of modern Chinese poetry that equate Chen's beauty with



romantic sentiment. In Tang Shi's poem "The Journey of Illusory Beauty" ("Huangmei zhi Lv"), Chen appears as the figure of Sappho who inspires the poet's own pursuit of romantic beauty, which is emphasised by him in "Remembering Jingrong" ("Huai Jingrong") (1990). This beauty is harmonious, as pure as a pearl. In the same essay, Tang praises Chen's conception of beauty which, he claims, brings the quality of innocence to her collection, *Overflow*. Similarly, the critic Jiang Dengke takes Chen's beauty as a romantic idealisation of life (226). In this sense, beauty in Chen's poetry is read as a romantic concept, harmonious, sentimental and vulnerable. In terms of this understanding, the crucial images are marginalised as an outdated Romantic practice.<sup>17</sup>

This treatment of H.D. and Chen's 'new beauty' sees beauty in their poetry as a fixed form of knowledge anchored in a long-established modern aesthetic tradition, which assigns to it a morally inferior position in the beauty/sublimity duality.

H.D.'s creation of 'new beauty', as I contend, encounters a modern Western aesthetic tradition deriving from the Burke-Kantian formulation of a beauty/sublimity duality. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756, with additions in 1757), Edmund Burke formulates the beauty/sublimity duality, which paves the way to establish a modern aesthetic tradition. Before Burke's innovative distinction, beauty was a mixed concept, one that referred to any pleasing sensible experience originating from either the harmonious forms of objects or from their splendour and greatness.<sup>18</sup> When the latter is subsumed under the concept of sublimity, however, beauty exclusively refers to the harmonious form of objects rather than referring to aesthetic feeling in general. Concurrently,

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<sup>17</sup> In the Chinese context, Romantic poetics was criticised for its bourgeois limitations since the late 1920s. Haiyan Lee remarks that "Political ideologies, in particular, called for a total commitment to the nation by subordinating the romantic imperative to that of revolution" (5). See details in Lee's *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (2007).

<sup>18</sup> Umberto Eco explicates the development of beauty in the Western context. See the details in his book *On Beauty* (2004).

the term aesthetics is coined to replace the former inclusive sense of beauty by avoiding the confusion caused by its ambiguous usage.<sup>19</sup> To some extent, the emergence of modern aesthetics is marked by the specification of this strategic term. Kant furthers Burke's dualist formulation and provides a more sustained philosophical account of the concept of beauty and sublimity in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). He envisions beauty as being found in contemplation, reflecting a dominating *I* and the subordinate *other*, since the object passively pleases the subject. Paired with the concept of sublimity, the judgment of beauty along with the beautiful things is assigned a moral inferiority, because it becomes less useful than sublimity in directing human beings to a better life. Both Burke and Kant connect sublimity to the concept of respect and reverence (Burke 136 and Kant 140). Centred on a body/mind duality, sublimity takes the superior position, because it elevates the subject from the sensuous to the spiritual, announcing the triumph of the spiritual power of the subject within mind. Moving the subject beyond the limits of the body to reach Reason, Kant posits sublimity as a means to actualise transcendence. Beauty, correspondingly, is related (and thus relegated,) to immanence. The beautiful and the action of the judgment of beauty thus sit at the lower end of the aesthetic-philosophical scale. Kantian theorisation of this duality has far-reaching influence in that it has allowed one type of judgment of beauty to become the dominant tradition.

Similarly, I situate Chen's creation of 'new beauty' in the modernisation of aesthetics in the Chinese context. In the process of modernisation, the traditional Chinese concept of beauty undergoes a reconceptualisation within a Western framework. In China, the

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<sup>19</sup> According to Paul Guyer, the term aesthetics was coined for a modern usage by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten in 1735 and his later definition in 1750 is often referred to the first definition of modern aesthetics. See details in Guyer's book *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (2005).

modernisation of aesthetics is also symbolised by the adoption of the term aesthetics and the Kantian specifications of beauty.<sup>20</sup>

This conflating of Chinese and Western aesthetics and the influence of Western aesthetics on shaping modern aesthetics in the Chinese context are explained by H. Gene Blocker in his introduction to *Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics* (1995). Blocker argues that aesthetics is an acceptable term when used to denote Chinese views of art and beauty including art criticism and aesthetic studies, because Chinese culture and Western culture confront and aim to address similar issues despite their obvious differences (Blocker 9). Blocker observes the strong Western influence on the configuration of Chinese aesthetics (8), arguing that Chinese aestheticians make great efforts to shape a modern aesthetics by referring to and assimilating similar experiences formed in a Western theoretical framework. Profiting from the Western model, Chinese aestheticians thus establish modern aesthetics in a local context.

Accompanied by the modernisation of aesthetics, the term beauty correspondingly embraces its modern conception. Similar to the history of beauty in the Western context, in the traditional Chinese context beauty referred to aesthetic feelings without differentiating them. Interestingly, the translation of the term aesthetics into Chinese hints at the historical connection between beauty and aesthetics. The borrowed term *mei xue*, a Japanese translation of aesthetics,<sup>21</sup> literally means “the study (*xue*) of beauty (*mei*)”. This translation suggests that the Chinese character *mei* denotes both aesthetics and beauty in a traditional context.

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<sup>20</sup> Kantian aesthetic categorisation is firstly introduced to China by Wang Guowei in his translation of *Introduction to Philosophy* (1900) from Japanese in 1902. Wang’s translation along with his following interpretation of the aesthetic categories, such as the sublime and the beautiful, in his other essays is considered to inaugurate the modern Chinese aesthetic study. E Xia explicates this process in her dissertation. See details in E, Xia. “The Generation and Evolution of the Aesthetic Key Words in Modern China.” Northeast Normal University, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> The Japanese translation of Aesthetics from Western language is registered by Chinese characters (kanji), *mei* (美) and *xue* (学). Kanji is one of the components of Japanese writing system adopted from Chinese characters.

This double meaning of *mei* corresponds to the same usage in premodern Western philosophy, before the invention of the term aesthetics in the eighteenth century. Chinese aestheticians observe the two folds of the term *mei* as a positive and a negative respectively. In the Confucian aesthetic tradition, the former occupies a higher moral position than the latter, because positive beauty is a way to experience transcendence which elevates the subject to ultimate goodness, whereas the more negative one indicates, rather, passivity and weakness, confining the subject to a naive, reflective sensory pleasure.<sup>22</sup> Given the similarity of the terms, Chinese aestheticians distinguish them with the help of Western aesthetic terminology. Correspondingly, positive beauty is named *sublimity*<sup>23</sup> and the negative, *beauty*. However, while the change of concepts does not mean the disappearance of any distinctive Chinese traditions. Connecting Chinese traditional aesthetics with Western enhances, rather than debasing, the hierarchy between beauty and sublimity. Moreover, as E Xia argues, the worship of power responding to the campaign of national salvation privileges sublimity over beauty (56). In this sense, beauty is brought up to date in a manner that parallels the modernisation of Western aesthetics. This connection between Chinese and Western aesthetic terms can be found in Li Zehou's *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics* (1994) and the recent *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition* (2010), and it is also found in Tang Yijie's comparative study between Chinese Confucian and Daoist aesthetics and Kantian and Hegelian aesthetics in the essay "Rethinking the Problem of Truth, Goodness and Beauty in Chinese Traditional Philosophy" ("Zai Lun Zhongguo Chuantong Zhexue de Zhen Shan Mei Wenti") (1990). Accordingly, the character *mei* in Chen's poetry refers to the negative form of beauty, synonymous with the modern Western aesthetic term of the same name.

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<sup>22</sup> This moral division is elucidated in Zhou Laixiang's "Harmony and Chinese Beauty", collected in *Contemporary Chinese Aesthetics* (1995).

<sup>23</sup> The common translation of sublimity in Chinese is *chonggao*, which indicates greatness and the elevating function in sublimity.

This brief overview of the meaning of aesthetics and beauty in Western and Chinese contexts reveals that modernised aesthetics based on Kantian categorisation in both contexts is associated with the concept of transcendence and champions sublimity over beauty. Beauty, in these two traditions, is inferior, passive and immanent. The modern tradition conventionalised the understanding of beauty and beautiful objects where the reading of images of beauty, based on by this convention, becomes a process of recognition rather than perception. Such a mechanical reading of beauty causes confusion among critics and compels them either to reconcile the conflict between the idea of conventionalised beauty and their actual experience in their reading, or simply to define the object of analysis as an aesthetic failure.

The paradigmatic understanding of beauty in both poets' poetry, taking the former as a prescribed concept, neglects the new in their creation of images of 'new beauty', which results in a major misreading of the poetry of 'new beauty'. Firstly, this reading must implicitly question any attempt at originality or expression of creativity. Beauty thus becomes a formalist merit, signalling these poems as simply existing as art for art's sake. In line with this reading, the early poetry of both focussing on beauty become mere attachments to the late Romanticism and Decadent Movement.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, these reductive treatments merely give a distant impression of their poetry. In both ways, the images of beauty are naturalised and neutralised. Beauty becomes a concept related to a distant age or beyond the human and thus is indifferent to real life in the present. In other words, this treatment aestheticises the images of 'new beauty' and removes them from any historical context.

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<sup>24</sup> Some critics take the interests in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Algernon Charles Swinburne's influence on H.D.'s writing. For example, Halsall, Alison J. *Rendering Siddall: H.D.'s Version of the Pre - Raphaelite "cult of Youthful Beauty"*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2004. Laity, Cassandra. "H.D. and A.C. Swinburne: Decadence and Modernist Women's Writing." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1989, pp. 461-484. Tang Shi along with some other critics points out the "bad" influence of Charles Baudelaire on Chen Jingrong's poetry. See Tang Shi's criticism in "The serious stars".

The other implication is a tendency to ignore the ‘new beauty’ and only to exploit its images to address gender issues. Aesthetic concerns thus often drop out from feminist critiques, because the concept of beauty implies a detachment from the social-historical context and at the same time symbolises the confinement and subjugation of women. When attached to sexuality, the hierarchical beauty/sublimity duality exposes a gender bias in both traditions. Linked to a masculinity/femininity binary, the hierarchy of beauty/sublimity presupposes a moral privilege of the male. French feminists, such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, address this problematic masculinity/femininity duality that is constructed based on sexual difference that confines women to a secondary position.<sup>25</sup> An aesthetic dualism, as I argue, is based on this gender bias. The link between women and beauty thereby relegates women to a secondary position, privileging a masculinist discourse centred on male values and meanings. I elaborate this point in the final chapter.

Feminists have made an effort to expose this gender bias inscribed in the paradigmatic form of beauty. Rita Freedman reveals the bond between women and beauty in *Beauty Bound* (1986). Based on both a theoretical consideration and the evidence from social surveys, she exposes the gender bias in the discourse of beauty and argues that this reduces women to their appearance and confines their value or worth to their bodily attractiveness. Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used against Women* (1991) further develops Freedman’s arguments. In this book, Wolf insightfully explains how the beauty myth works and argues that the ideology of beauty is the battle field where women must fight for their freedom. These feminist critiques reveal the gender bias deeply concealed in aesthetic form and give the term of beauty a discursive and political importance. Beauty thus is transferred from a purely aesthetic category to one that has now also acquired a social-cultural

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<sup>25</sup> The revelation of this patriarchal duality can be seen in Cixous’ “Sorties” in *The Newly Born Woman* (1986) and Irigaray’s *This Sex which is Not One* (1985) and *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985).

resonance. The book *Beauty Matters* (2000) edited by Peggy Brand, is a series of essays that follows the direction pointed out by Wolf, explores the values and politics of beauty. Malin Pereira's work *Embodying Beauty: Twentieth-century American Women Writers' Aesthetics* (2000) echoes this achievement. Pereira uses the "Sea Rose" as an example to argue that H.D. proposes a new imagist aesthetics and a new aesthetic of female beauty (16). Although she discovers the double function of H.D.'s 'new beauty' in her book, she subsumes the expression under the discussion of how women are viewed in a male-dominated aesthetic tradition and overlooks the interaction between H.D.'s poetics and its aesthetics of female beauty. Thus the poetic aesthetics of 'new beauty' is sacrificed for her feminist agenda. The problem of misreading, like the former position, is also caused by a presumptuous understanding of beauty, yet one now taken to the opposite extreme.

After feminists' often polarised two-decade long scholarly investment in the ideological aspects of beauty, Rita Felski calls for a return to the aesthetic aspects of beauty in the essay "Because it is Beautiful: New Feminist Perspectives on Beauty" (2006). She argues that new feminist perspectives on beauty will not only build upon past critiques which expose the 'ugly' underside of beauty, such as female subjugation, but will also promote an invigorated dialectic of aesthetics and politics. In *Beauty Unlimited* (2012), Peggy Brand points out that the study of beauty in the context of globalisation complicates any simplistic assumptions, either aesthetic or political. After providing a brief overview of recent aesthetic and feminist studies on beauty, she urges the feminist study of beauty to enter into new terrain for "beauty unlimited" with a multi-disciplinary methodology (4). Thus, Brand calls for a balanced direction, that is, "to motivate the evolution of such new feminist perspectives on beauty" (8). In the introduction to *Female Beauty in Art* (2014), Maria Ioannou echoes Brand's conception of the so-called "new direction" and advocates a study of a female-centred discourse of beauty, rather than negatively assuming its discourse to be an instrument

solely the prerogative of patriarchy. She argues instead for a discourse of beauty which facilitates female empowerment. The method proposed by Ioannou suggests a paradigm shift that moves from criticising the regulation of the masculine to discovering a unique feminist discourse originated by the reconsideration of beauty's aesthetic power.

This thesis, echoing the recasting of the feminist study of beauty, views the 'new beauty' from a female-centred perspective and establishes the relationship between the aesthetic power of beauty and the poets' position as female subjects. It treats the former as a new concept produced by a unique judgment of beauty. This approach avoids the paradigmatic understanding and brings back the 'new beauty' to the starting point where an act of judgment occurs and views it as a construct. As a product of the interplay between the 'new' from a female perspective and the aesthetic term 'beauty', 'new beauty' is not a modification of conventionalised form within historical aesthetic traditions but a radical revision of it. This treatment thus integrates both sides of the term, not only focusing on the 'new' experience brought to light by women but also linking the production of the 'new' to women's aesthetic practice of judging what 'beauty' might now be. In uncovering the dynamic between the aesthetic and the cultural in any conception of beauty this thesis argues that the dynamic between the two generates the discursive power of the poetry of 'new beauty' as the expression of women's voices.

## 1.2 The Judgment of Beauty and Its Politics

In order to examine the *dialectic* in the new concept of 'new beauty', I now apply some observations from the Kantian theory of the judgment of beauty to argue that the



judgment of ‘new beauty’ as an aesthetic practice based on individual experiences enables these two women poets negotiate their own understanding of the external world.

With respect to Western philosophy, the Kantian judgment of beauty has provided a metatheory of beauty and revealed a path through which it may be realised. In a broad philosophical context, Kant uses his theory of aesthetic judgment to complete his own philosophical system, bridging the gap between *Understanding* (which operates from within a deterministic framework) and *Reason* (which operates on the grounds of freedom). By this formulation, Kant argued for a transcendental Aesthetics, which shows how the observing subject’s mind organises and structures the sensory world. Because the focal point of this thesis is not philosophy but the actual practice of making the judgement of beauty, I confine my argument on Kant to what happens to the judging subject in the judgment of beauty.

Its mechanism, in fact, can be seen more clearly when it is separated from the whole package of Kant’s theory of beauty. In “Kant and the Politics of Beauty”, Tobin Siebers argues that “some of today’s commentators view Kantian aesthetics as wholly traditional because of their powerful influence on our imagination but forget how truly radical they are” (36). In the same vein, Roger Scruton provides a way to understand Kant’s judgment of beauty and beautiful objects by dividing them respectively as a metatheory of beauty and the conclusion from Kantian methodology in his book *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction* (2008). What is called beauty within the Kantian dualistic tradition refers to the latter. While the latter is fixed in the conventionalised concept of beauty as a form of knowledge, the former is changeable, or more precisely, generative. As Siebers claims, beauty is not conservative but is as much radical as Kantian sublimity (37). In this sense, beauty refers not only to an aesthetic form, a feature of being itself, but also an act. As Scruton claims, beauty is not about things in the world but about a particular experience of them, and about the pursuit of meaning that springs from that experience (108). In this sense, Kantian theory of the

judgment of beauty, provides the dynamic in the judgment of beauty in three aspects: relationship between an *I* and the *other*, the primary role of individual bodily experience in forming a judgment of beauty, and the social importance of the judgment of beauty.<sup>26</sup>

Firstly, Kant posits a relationship between an *I* and the *other* in the process of making judgment of beauty. In other words, the judgment of beauty reflects how an *I* as a subject respond to the encountered external world, which echoes Kantian philosophy.<sup>27</sup> It thus affirms the agency of every human beings as the subject, an entity in opposition to the ‘real’ object.<sup>28</sup> Kant rests this encounter between *I* and the *other* on the action of *contemplation*, claiming that “in the aesthetic judgment on the beautiful in nature it is in calm contemplation.” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 141). This act involves a beholder and the beheld. The beholder as the judging subject is the *I* and the beheld, external to the beholder, is the *other*. Beautiful things are the objects that induce the feeling of pleasure through their objective forms in the process of gazing. Siebers acutely summarises Kant when he shows that the experience of beauty resides exclusively in neither the object nor the subject but in the combination of both as free and unique particulars and where objects of beauty present us with the experience of otherness (34).<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, Kant emphasises the primary role of individual bodily experience in forming a judgment of beauty. He is not the first philosopher who gives importance to the instrumental function of the human body in judging beauty. Edmund Burke’s concept of

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<sup>26</sup> Scruton remarks that Kantian theory of beauty is inherently controversial with an attempt in to define aesthetic judgement and to give it a central role in the life of a rational being but it provides a starting point of discussing the judgment of beauty.

<sup>27</sup> As Paul Crowther emphasises, aesthetic judgment in Kantian philosophy reflects the relationship between the subject (the human being) and the object (the external world) (2-3). See the details in his book *The Kantian Aesthetic: From Knowledge to the Avant-Garde* (2010).

<sup>28</sup> To avoid the complexity of the term subject, I confine this term to its context of the eighteenth century in line with Kant and his commentators and critics’ usage, when discussing the subject in Kantian view in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The subject often appearing as human being or mind in Kantian text refers to the human agent who experiences, acts, feels, and so forth.

<sup>29</sup> Siebers nevertheless admits that the otherness is of a small scale, being not as strong as the effect caused by sublimity.

beauty is empirical, originating from human perception (149-151). In other words, human bodily experience is the basis that forms the idea of beauty. Garrett Jeter terms Burke's theory a "corporeal epistemology" or "corporeal philosophy", positioning "the source of a person's knowledge of beauty in the body either primarily or at minimum as a phenomenological colleague with the intellect" (239). Kant furthers Burke's formulation and emphasises the importance of the free play of imagination, the mechanism in which mind processes bodily experience in the judgment of beauty. Burke adds that the human body is a bedrock of this judgement, but Kantian improvement assigns autonomy and freedom to the judging subject. This freedom and autonomy is based on the directness and concreteness of the relationship between the body of the subject and the object.

Thirdly, Kant attaches social importance to the judgment of beauty. Kant points out that communicating the judgment of beauty with society is the inclination of the judging subject. The judgment of beauty, as a reflection of an object, is intended to be universal and communicable. Kant argues that "the judgment of taste determines its object with regard to satisfaction (as beauty) with a claim to the assent of everyone, as if it were objective" (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 162). Paul Guyer explains this inclination: "if my use of the predicate 'beautiful' is not to be irrational, I must have 'some reason for demanding a similar delight from everyone'" (*Kant and the Claims of Taste* 119). The *disinterestedness* in the judgment of beauty requires a detachment of personal or private investment, thus making the process lie beyond the interests of the individual. The assertion of beauty in the judgment process thus refers not to pleasure as such but to the "subjectively universal validity" of individual pleasure in the object (*Kant Critique of the Power of Judgment* 169). Kant argues that if someone pronounces that something is beautiful then ideally, the same satisfaction is

*expected* from others.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, Kant sees this feature of the judgment of beauty as objectivity and contends that objectivity guarantees the communicability of the judgment of beauty (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 162-166). In this sense, making a judgment of beauty is ultimately an action of articulation towards the public. However, Bart Vandenabeele contests a Kantian formulation which rests the universality of beauty on universal validity by questioning the possibility of pure disinterestedness, which excludes any special aspect of the mental state. In the essay “Beauty, Disinterested Pleasure, and Universal Communicability: Kant’s Response to Burke” (2012), Vandenabeele privileges the universal communicability in the judgment of beauty on the so-called “primordial solidarity”, which highlights the freedom of imagination, the mental force of human beings. As he claims in another essay “The Subjective Universality of Aesthetic Judgements Revisited” (2008), the autonomy of the judgement of beauty is not presupposed but made possible by the modal requirement as such. He explains that the subjective necessity to be universally shared is thus a necessity that is not moral, but strictly epistemological. He is optimistic in the communicability of the judgment of beauty, since he believes that communicability is, in fact, an inherent human capability.

Kant theorises the power of judging beauty and links the symbolism of aesthetics to politics. Tobin Siebers terms this as Kantian aesthetic politics, thereby placing the Kantian theory of beauty at the origin of modern liberalism. He brings the politics of beauty into theoretical consideration once more, since it has been largely ignored by post-modernists, who have taken more interest in the sublime.

Furthermore, Siebers discovers that the political power of beauty lies in the Kantian formulation of judging beauty as a reflective judgment, which is different from determinant

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<sup>30</sup> From the standpoint of the judgmental subjects, they anticipate agreements to their judgment from others in society. However, the assent of others is not necessary for the legislation of making such judgment.

judgment. In Kantian terms, the determinant judgment applies general and given concepts to objects of understanding rather than experiencing the object in all of its uniqueness, bordering on the *thing-in-itself*. Siebers argues that “we project our own framework of concepts upon it as if it were a screen” (33). He points out that a determinant judgment in Kantian formulation brings a certain conceptualised prejudice to the sphere of understanding. The judgement of beauty as an aesthetic judgment, however, starts with the perception of a particular object and forms a general idea from it, without applying concepts. The individual experience, reflecting values and meanings of the judging subject, is embodied in the judgment of beauty thus allowing individual freedom (Kant *Critique of the Power of Judgment* 23). In this sense, aesthetic judgment is based on and related to the individual *per se*. Paul Guyer speaks highly of Kant’s insight on the degree of subjective freedom in the judgment of beauty and remarks that the aesthetic experience of beauty is to some extent the evidence of the self-existence and character of human freedom (*Value of Beauty* 166). Accordingly, the action of making a judgment of beauty has the potential power to escape from social definition. A symbolism (a coded, *social* understanding) consisting of pre-given concepts, exerts the least influence on the individual judging the beautiful object than it does on other intellectual activities. In this respect, individual experience, as well as subjectivity itself (the existence and values of the individual), can be formed and articulated freely through exercising the judgment of beauty. In this sense, Siebers takes Kantian beauty as “the remedy for prejudice” (47).

The so-called “remedy for prejudice” lies not in a universal validity of beauty among every judging subject, but in a dialectic between the major and minor judgments. In other words, universal validity is only for the dominating group of judging subjects. The subjectivity in the judgment of beauty not only frees the judging subject from the intervening of social constraints but also calls a transcendental beauty into question. Because of the impossibility of absolute disinterestedness in a specific practice, the absolutely objective

universal validity based on disinterestedness is impossible.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, Kantian proposition of *a priori* as the foundation of the universal validity is problematic. In other words, the judgment of beauty is specific and historical. However, Vandenabeele points out that universal validity is based on social consensus. He argues that

the beautiful is an affective experience which qua aesthetic experience is logically distinguishable from those connected with the vicissitudes of everyday life, but which, if understood correctly, reveals a foundation in social structures that are immanent to, but customarily concealed within, that life. Judgments of beauty do not exist in a vacuum, but have intimate connections with fundamental social aspects of human life. (“Beauty, Disinterested Pleasure, and Universal Communicability” 232)

As Vandenabeele suggests, the subjectivity of the judgment of beauty brings to bear the judging subject’s social and historical conditions which are inscribed in his/her experiences. The outcome of the judgment of beauty thus carries the social-historical baggage of the judging subject. Consequently, we also produce prejudice through our judgment of beauty. As a result, a pure judgment of beauty appealing to the assent of every judging subject is ideal. In this sense, the judgment of beauty is a specific, historical and cultural practice and the notion of beauty as its outcome is a social construct.

This contradiction between the action of judging beauty and the verdict of beauty suggests the politics of beauty. The judgment of beauty, in this sense, creates a site for individuals to confront society. As a Consequence, the difference produced by judgment suggests that the problem is not only for the inquiry of philosophy but also has social-cultural significance. The difference in judgment of beauty along with the impulse to communicate it reflects a competition between the individual subjective feelings with respect to beauty in an

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<sup>31</sup> Apart from Siebers’ interpretation, Bart Vandenabeele explicitly discusses this problem in his essay “Beauty, Disinterested Pleasure, and Universal Communicability: Kant’s Response to Burke.”

object and its conventionalised notion, a shared understanding of what beauty might be. As Siebers claims, the necessity of universal assent in aesthetic judgments opens a debate in which individual people make their private feelings about beauty the object of public dispute. By this means does a judgment of beauty become political. As Scruton argues,

it challenges us to find meaning in its object, to make critical comparisons, and to examine our own lives and emotions in the light of what we find. Art, nature and the human form all invite us to place this experience in the centre of our lives. ... The judgement of beauty orders the emotions and desires of those who make it. It may express their pleasure and their taste: but it is pleasure in what they value and taste for their true ideals. (108)

In this sense, the judgement of beauty produces a comparison between the individual discourse of beauty and the social symbolism consisting of a shared aesthetic vocabulary.

This dialectic in aesthetic practice provides a foundation for this thesis. I argue that the poetry of ‘new beauty’ presents an ironic beauty contest between the powerful images of ‘new beauty’ and the vulnerable images of conventionalised beauty within the modernised aesthetic tradition inaugurated by the establishment of beauty-sublimity dualism. On the one hand, H.D. and Chen make their own judgements of beauty through the poetry of ‘new beauty’. On the other, the dualistic aesthetic tradition forms the basis of the dominant social consensus. This competition, as I will show, is enacted by poetic *estrangement*, since the two poets create the images of ‘new beauty’ by deforming but empowering conventionalised beautiful objects. By means of estrangement, the contrast between two types of beauty thus is demonstrated by the transformation. In this sense, poetic estrangement offers the poetry of ‘new beauty’ as the site of a conversation between the individual and the society. From this I argue that ‘new beauty’ is a new judgment of beauty which negotiates the subjective voices

of two women poets with the dominant social values by revising traditional aesthetic vocabulary through estrangement in the poetry of 'new beauty'. I rest my core argument on the original notion of estrangement from Russian formalism but take the notion much further to show that estrangement as a strategy of language appropriation has two functions. Firstly, it suggests the aesthetic innovation of the poetry of 'new beauty' by functioning as a poetic device; secondly, it reveals the discursive power of 'new beauty' poetry by functioning as an instrument to translate the poets' subjectivity into language through a radically new form of judgment.

### 1.3 Poetic Estrangement and the Formation of the Discourse of Beauty

In order to examine the function of estrangement in 'new beauty', I develop my arguments based on a reading that draws on formalist and structuralist theories of poetic language, Kristevan theory of poetic language and text, and the theory and methodology of Discourse Studies. This analysis is to reveal the aesthetic and social-cultural values of 'new beauty' through poetic estrangement by answering three questions: how these estranged images are structured to represent 'new beauty'; how the estrangement produces the judging subject of the 'new beauty' and how the estrangement forms a site for a competition between feminist discourse represented by the poetry of 'new beauty' and the dominant masculinist discourse which forms conventionalised beauty.

The formalist, structuralist, and the formalist critical theories of Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson and Cleanth Brooks provide a range of formalist methods to configure the images of 'new beauty' as *estranged* language patterns. With the focus respectively on language deviation, the linguistic code and the organic united structure of poetry, these



models account for the aesthetic meanings, and values in altering normative language and reveal the constructive meaning of a poetic image which is suggested by poetic form.

Viktor Shklovsky in his essay “Art as Device” (1917) posits the concept of estrangement in its modern use, which inaugurates “the transformation which has overtaken literary theory in this [the twentieth] century” (Eagleton xiii).<sup>32</sup> Originally in Russian, *ostranenie* (estrangement) means making strange. In “Art as Device”, Shklovsky distinguishes images from symbols and points out that images are not something which “endure and last” as do symbols (2). Based on this distinction, he formulates a second distinction: poetic images and prose images, the former for perception, the latter, abstraction. In this pairing, the poetic image is changeable according to specific perception while the prose image by contrast, functions as a concept representing consistency. He points out that using conventionalised images is disposition not creation. The distinction between these two types of images differentiate poetic language from the practical language of everyday use (Shklovsky 4). In this sense, Shklovsky argues that “the artistic quality of something, in relationship to poetry, is a result of our mode of perception” and this aesthetic effect is achieved by *estrangement*. Shklovsky argues that estranging objects and complicating form as an artistic device, makes a perception “long” and “laborious”, which revives the direct and ‘real’ relationship between human beings and the external objects by creating aesthetic distance (6). The accompanying estrangement, avoiding the intervention of established concepts, inscribes the aesthetic values of poetry and reveals the process of creativity by interrogating the established language signs and their meanings and providing an alternative. Estrangement is thus a power of resisting automatisations, breaking the established habits of reception and implying the impulse to destabilise. Estranged form makes poetry a form of

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<sup>32</sup> Cristina Vatulescu argues that estrangement is the “cornerstone of modern literary theory” in her review of Douglas Robinson’s book *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht* (2008).

structured speech in which language is impeded and distorted (13). Shklovsky further argues that poetic language has its own logic manifested in the formational devices of disruption and violation of “the rhythm of prose” (that is, the normative use of language). This causes the estrangement effect in a poem. Because of this, the ensuing poetic estrangement can become a site from which to posit an opposition between subjective embodying practice and static knowledge and to demonstrate the relation between individual creativity and tradition, so revealing the potential mutation of shared communal values.

Roman Jakobson extends Shklovsky’s ideas and theories so that poetic estrangement is seen to be the poetic function of language from a linguistic perspective. Firstly, he undoes the rigidity of the link between the word and its given meaning by distinguishing general meaning which is pre-given from contextual meaning based on specific grammatical structure in “Some Questions of Meaning” (1973), which sharpens Shklovsky’s distinction between poetic images and prose images. Secondly, he argues that the meaning of poetic language in a specific text is generated from context, consisting of a linguistic context constructed by the grammatical structure (morphological structures, classes, parts of speech, and so forth) and the historical-cultural context involving social and personal values (“Some Questions of Meaning” 320-322).

As a result, poetry is free from the regulation of the normative laws of language, but has special rules regarding its appropriation for constructing meaning. Poetic estrangement in this theoretical framework is the linguistic effect caused by the poetic function of language, whose meaning is coded according to the “grammar of poetry” (a *metaphoric association*) (“Two Aspects of Language” 132-133). In other words, the estranged concepts and images gain meanings from association based on similarities. According to Linda Waugh, estrangement as a violation is thus made apprehensible through the structure of signs as a system (153).

In the essay “Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics” (1958), Jakobson specifies the theory of the grammar of poetry by postulating the term *poetic function*, among another five communicative functions of language, namely the referential, the emotive, the conative, the phatic and the meta-lingual. Although this categorisation is not flawless, Jakobson provides insights into how meaning is constructed by the appropriation of language. I put the issues related to Jakobson’s categorisation aside because this thesis specifically focuses on how these functions operate in constructing meanings rather than the effectiveness of the categorisation *per se*. The poetic function establishes *equivalence relations* between the language elements in a poem, which undoubtedly distinguishes poetry from other speech acts or verbal forms. Jakobson observes that constructing language involves two aspects: selection and combination. In most circumstances, selection is based on the rule of equivalence while combination complies with the rules of contiguity. The former is *metaphoric* and the latter is *metonymic*. However, Jakobson discovers that poetic language is metaphoric, combined through the rule of equivalence. The poetic function, according to Jakobson’s definition, “projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination” (“Linguistics and Poetics” 358). This equivalence, in specific poetic texts, thus is manifested by parallel structures such as “similarity or contrast”, “synonymity or antonymity” (“Two Aspects of Language” 133; “Linguistics and Poetics” 358). Waugh illuminates more explicitly how the rule of equivalence relations operates in poetry: “In the poetic text, a given word may be chosen not only because of its paradigmatic association with other words in the linguistic code, but also because of its equivalence relations with other words in the text itself.” (358) In other words, the meaning of a word in a poem is generated by the meaning of other words in the poem based on association ruled by equivalence. Jakobson explains that the metre, meaning and arrangement of tropes in a poem “cease to be the free and individual and unpredictable parts” (“Linguistics and Poetics” 369); they can explain and interpret each

other given the rules of equivalence in parallelism. In consequence, concepts or images in a poem may be estranged from their normal usage, because a poetic context alters the literary or lexical meaning of a word. In turn, the estranged images are comprehensible, if only in a poetic context. The poetic function thus challenges the bond between a word and what it refers to (objects, concepts, and ideas). In this sense, the contextual meaning of the word becomes the 'real' meaning beyond the lexical meaning in general.

To recapitulate, the estrangement or defamiliarisation of the word is the product of the poetic function of language. The principle of equivalence which breaks normative syntax thus echoes what Shklovsky terms "the rhythm of poetry". Meaning in a poetic image, in Jakobson's view, is therefore determined by all its parallel linguistic elements in a poem rather than its pre-given meaning packed into the conventionalised concept. In this sense, a distorted linguistic form can also possess meaning which is determined by the parallel principle, once again demonstrating how in Jakobson too, poetic function operates to shape the estranged poetic form.

Unlike Shklovsky's focus on separate poetic images, Jakobson's emphasis of context suggests two correlated temporal approaches to contextualising poetic estrangement, namely the synchronic and the diachronic. The first method sees a poem as an atemporal product of language. This method assumes that the poetic meaning of a word is defined by the inner grammatical structure of a poem. The second method sees composing poetry as an event influenced by social-personal values at a specific time. These methods place the investigation of estrangement in a larger historical and social context assist in revealing the pattern of certain estranged forms.

In *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947), the American New Critic Cleanth Brooks<sup>33</sup> integrates both the empirical and psychological accounts in Shklovsky's formulation of estrangement and Jakobson's linguistic approach in an expanded definition of poetic form. He posits a poem as an organic structure in which meaning is constructed. As he claims later in the essay "The Formalist Critics" (1951), "the primary concern of criticism is with the problem of unity - the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form, and the relation of the various parts to each other in building up this whole" (72). Brooks suggests that a poem is to be studied literally by metre, tone, image, and the like and contends that the structure signals the way of the poet's saying. He argues that the meaning of poetry comes from the breaching of normative semantics and syntax, and lies in the estranged poetic forms produced by ambiguity, paradox and irony.

All these three types of theory (formalist, structuralist, and formalist critical theories) take poetry as an object consisting of language elements and posit poetic estrangement as the site of generating meanings. In this thesis, these theories, emphasising the specificity and autonomy of poetic language, thus licence estrangement in poetry—and therefore provide the theoretical scaffolding for the estranged images which represent 'new beauty'.

Formalist and structuralist theories do reveal ambiguous attitudes to the social-historical context of poetry. All of them acknowledge the impact of the social-historical context but because they centre the meaning of a poem in its formal devices by treating it as an object, they fail to investigate the motivation or origination of estrangement. Obviously, the principle of poetic function or the nature of poetry is not the only reason for violation of

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<sup>33</sup> Cleanth Brooks is best known for his contributions to New Criticism a formalist movement in literary theory that dominated American literary criticism in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The New Critics explore formalist methods to examine the inner structure of poetry by close-reading and emphasise the aesthetic values of poetry.

language. There is a writing (speaking) subject in the act of making strange, which is neglected in a static observation and theorisation. In other words, the relationship between poetry and the poets and their situations needs closer discussion. The attitudes to the position of the poet along with the social-historical context in the poem thus are ambivalent factors for formalism and structuralism which privileges the autonomy of language.

Based on structuralist linguistics and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Julia Kristeva, however, posits a theory of poetic language in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), which bridges the gulf between the poets and their poetry by viewing the text as a dynamic signifying process. Kristevan theory thus provides a new way to understand poetic estrangement, taking both the estranged form of language and its diverse processes into account.

Firstly, Kristevan theory of the text profoundly reveals the political power of the estranged form of language as a revision of the existing symbolic system. Distinguishing language and symbolic system (the socially coded part of language), Kristeva assigns the term *semiotic* to address the undomesticated part of language, which is directly connected to bodily experience. Estelle Barret views the two-term system as “double articulation” (4). During the “double articulation”, the semiotic complicates the articulation by breaching the symbolic system. The estrangement thus is produced by the symbolic break. As Kristeva suggests, the semiotic is represented “as a ‘second’ return of instinctual functioning within the symbolic, as a negativity introduced into the symbolic order, and as a transgression of that order” (69). Kristeva explains that the “linguistic structures that attest to this practice of the process are radically transformed by it. These rhythmic, lexical, even syntactic changes disturb the transparency of the signifying chain and open it up to the material crucible of production” (101). The symbolic thus is an invariant based on social prescription, while the semiotic is a variate based on individual concrete bodily experience. Poetic language

therefore may be defined as a semiotic system generated by a speaking subject within a social, historical field. Poetry as a text is not, then, a finished object but a signifying process driven by contradiction between the semiotic system and symbolic system, a place for exchanging and circulating meaning (Kristeva, 56). Kristevan theory thus shatters the entity of the poet, the poetic form and its social context and then appropriates equal positions in order for all the elements to enter the text, including the poet's body, unconsciousness, consciousness, concrete situations and the linguistic elements.

A text, in Kristevan formulation, is not a static linguistic form but a dynamic signifying practice. In this formulation, the poet and the context are not something attached as a reference to a poem, but actively enter into its production process. Meaning thus is not something objective waiting to be decoded from a fixed form, but constructed during a dynamic process. Therefore, the text-in-process articulates the logic of practice which leads to the transgression of established codes and a rupturing of meaning to produce revolutionary discourse. In this process, the semiotic made up of articulatory or phonetic effects transforms the symbolic and thus estranges linguistic form. In other words, estrangement marks the dynamic between the symbolic and the semiotic. More than linguistic deviation or a special linguistic code, *estrangement* thus is a heterogeneous creation originating from the revolutionary transformation of existing symbolism. Part of the argument of this thesis is that the estranged images of 'new beauty' are not a modification of the existing aesthetic vocabulary, but a revolution of the aesthetic tradition.

Secondly, Kristevan theory of the text posits a subject position generated in the process of estrangement, the dynamic between the symbolic and the semiotic. Distinguishing between the writing subject and the poet solves the problem that remained in formalist and structuralist theory. Because the poet participates in the text as shattered pieces, namely a plurality, such as his or her body, consciousness, and unconsciousness, the poet and the body

are not a unity but a totality (Kristeva 101). Kristeva defines that “We view the subject in language as decentring the transcendental ego, cutting through it, and opening it up to a dialectic in which its syntactic and categorical understanding is merely the liminal moment of the process, which is itself always acted upon by the relation to the other dominated by the death drive and its productive reiteration of the ‘signifier’” (30). In this formulation, the subject is the outcome of the dynamic between the poet and its social-historical context, registering as the estranged linguistic form. Accordingly, the poet is not an author who controls the meaning of the text, but rather the poet connects the poetic form and its social-historical context by the presence of his/her body, and as a consequence, the speaking subject is a product of heterogeneous forces. The subject thus is constructive, revealing himself/herself in the text, as Kristeva puts it, “the subject is in process/on trial” (101). This subject, therefore, is not a perpetually fixed point, but an “act through the text’s organization” (Kristeva 126). In other words, the subject is not pre-existing but produced within the text and represented by the structure and completion of the text. The text’s organisation, in the Kristevan view, echoes the organic structure theory of Cleanth Brooks in that the poetic text constructs a subject position to articulate. This articulation, therefore, reflects the dynamic between language and social context. In this sense, Kristevan theory connects a fragmented language form to the poet’s agency. Similarly, this thesis treats the estrangement of the images of ‘new beauty’ as an approach of both poets’ actions of aesthetic judgment, arguing that in the process, the notion of ‘new beauty’ constructs subjectivity through the latter’s articulation.

These two aspects of Kristevan theory provide an account for estrangement in the images of ‘new beauty’ not as a static aesthetic form but as a product of the signifying practice. Poetic form thus reveals the contradiction between the poet and his/her social-historical conditions by the process of producing a speaking subject: strangement as a site of



production where the speaking subject reveals the ‘real’ conditions of the two poets’ existence.

The Kristevan understanding of the speaking subject urges my thesis to take on an examination of the contradiction between the poets and their social-historical conditions, from which originates the subject’s articulation and shapes subjectivity. *Discourse Studies* (discourse analysis), which integrates the linguistic structure and social function, sheds light on this and reveals the social and cultural significance of the subject’s articulation in the poetry of ‘new beauty’.

As an interdisciplinary field, Discourse Studies combines the linguistic and social-historical concerns to reveal the social and political values in poetic estrangement by examining the relationship between the form and appropriation of language and the social position of the speaking subject as a participant of communication.

The term discourse is used principally in two different ways: in a pragmatic social-linguistic understanding and in a socio-historical understanding. The introduction to the *Discourse Studies Reader* (2014) outlines the pragmatic attributes as “a cluster of context-dependent practices”, socially constituted and socially constitutive, related to a macro-topic and linked to evaluation (4). In a social-historical understanding, discourse refers to an ensemble of verbal and non-verbal practices of large social communities (Angermuller, et al. 4-6).

Discourse analysis reveals the social-historical conditions of a speaking subject by examining how he/she appropriates language in a certain context and how it is related to certain topics through the language form. Discursive practices testify to the intricate relationship of power and subjectivity. This means that discourse regulates the construction of meaning and appropriates power to the participant. In a discourse, “not everybody has the

same chance to become visible and exist as a subject, to participate in exchanges with others and thus to shape what counts as reality in a community” (Angermuller, et al. 6). Thus, discourse analysis engages with this so-called “triangle of discourse”-power, knowledge and subjectivity-by dealing with three basic components: language, practice and context (Angermuller, et al. 7). This methodology suggests that the analysis of a discourse is able to examine and determine the connections between linguistic structure and agency.

Discourse is itself a plural, competing term. Michel Foucault observes a competition through language within discourse, arguing that it is “constituted by the difference between what one might correctly say at a given time (according to the rules of grammar and those of logic) and what is actually said. The discursive field is, at any given time, the law of this difference” (109). Discourse deploys a neutral field where speech and writing can cause variations in the system of their opposition and a difference in their functioning. This perpetual competition destabilises the rigidity of knowledge and concept.

Moreover, Foucault envisions an “individualisation of discourses”, conceiving of a discourse as “an ensemble of singular utterances dispersed on the sociohistorical terrain” (99). He claims that discourses have autonomy and can redefine their own individuality. As discourse varies, meaning is not to be understood as an inherent property of utterances or texts but considered as generated in a specific discourse, made of language in specific contexts. The theory formulates a comparison between discourse as naturalised social order and discourse as specific communicative practices. The individualisation of discourses thus questions authority and institutionalised knowledge, demonstrating the generative power it possesses to construct new meanings. Estrangement thus creates a new, concrete and individual discourse to contest the hegemony of dominating discourse.

The examination of estrangement within the theoretical framework discussed above builds up a relationship between poetic estrangement as linguistic violation and the judgment of 'new beauty'. In this sense, estrangement registers the difference between the 'new beauty' and conventionalised beauty through the transformation effected in language. In other words, estrangement as a poetic device connecting the perception of the poets to language translates the subject of 'new beauty' into the poetry in question by creating images of 'new beauty'. And therefore, estrangement is a poetic device to create images that represent 'new beauty', on the one hand, and to construct subjectivity in the poetry, on the other.

To summarise: this theoretic framework of reading estrangement reveals that the poetry of 'new beauty' is a discourse of beauty that contests the dualistic aesthetic tradition.

#### 1.4 Modernism and the Context of Creating the Imagery of 'New Beauty'

Because the examination of estrangement requires a consideration of the two poets' social-historical situations, this thesis contextualises the poetry of 'new beauty' within modernism, which is the nexus of H.D. and Chen's individual poetic practice. In order to dismantle the plurality of modernism, I propose that modernism is a context, where all the possible aesthetic responses to modernity are generated. Given the instability of symbolism, the context of modernism enables women to redefine meanings from a female-centred perspective. The poetry of 'new beauty' is a poetic response to the perception of fragmentation and a discursive response to one of the radical changes of gender relations, the emergence of the New Woman as a social group, in this thesis, in the context of modernism.

Modernism has been a controversial and dazzling term in literary criticism, having evolved from a singular concept denoting a series of avant-garde movements in formal and

aesthetic innovation to a plural and discursive concept denoting a large-scale cultural phenomenon. As Susan Friedman argues in “Planetarity” (2010), “All that is solid melts into air. We know that. Why should we want a stability for the field that the modernists themselves rebelled against?” (471) Modernism is now generally agreed to be a term with multi-layers and facets, a global phenomenon beyond the boundaries of time, space, nation and culture.<sup>34</sup> In *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate* (2009), Stephen Ross announces that “The old geographical, temporal, and material limits on what qualified as modernism have been determinedly dismantled” (1).

In the history of criticism here has been a remarkable development of this term from the original singular form of *modernism* to a plural form of *modernisms*.<sup>35</sup> The conventional understanding, focusing on the aesthetic principles and practice of the so-called “Men of 1914”,<sup>36</sup> views modernism as a loose affiliation of aesthetic movements beginning from the late nineteenth century and thriving in the first half of the twentieth century. Since the term originated in response to the imperative to define the new in the early twentieth century literature and art, its conventional definition has been subsumed under existing terms rather than retaining independent meanings.<sup>37</sup> Modernism in more recent literary criticism gained a series of independent meanings in the 1970s, but the definition remained oversimplified as an aesthetic revolution of form. For instance, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane take modernism merely as a “stylistic abstraction” in *Modernism: 1890-1930* (1976). However,

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<sup>34</sup> Susan Friedman gives an overview of recent modernist studies in her book *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*.

<sup>35</sup> However, “modernisms” adopted by different scholars refers to different aspects of modernism for their particular concerns.

<sup>36</sup> Wyndham Lewis coined the term in his autobiographical work, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937). This term now usually refers to the coterie of writers and artists centred around James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis in the early twentieth century England, who created so-called *high modernism*.

<sup>37</sup> Edmund Wilson describes modernism as the development of symbolism in his influential *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (1931). Northrop Frye argues for modernism as a post-Romantic movement in the book *Romanticism Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute* (1963).

the new modernist studies open this term to a broader field.<sup>38</sup> Andreas Huyssen's *After The Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986) locates modernism in a larger social and historical framework, Bonnie Scott's *Refiguring Modernism* (1995) claims a feminist perspective and Peter Nicholls' book *Modernisms* (1995) proposes a notion of multi-dimensions of modernism. The proliferation of post-colonialism and multi-culturalism invites a new interest in understanding modernism in a global context. *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (2005), provides a new perspective on modernism breaking the racial and geographical barriers by devising a *geomodernism* to call for the equality of races and locations in modernism. Under these initiatives, the "Men of 1914" have 'abdicated'; dominance of the masculine Western voice has thus been dismissed. The resulting polylogue in modernism welcomes diverse voices from different races, classes, genders, and cultures. Modernism, therefore, is indissolubly attached to cultural and political significance.

The expansion of this term, as Susan Friedman argues, may endanger its functionality. Friedman warns that "the danger of an expansionist modernism lapsing into meaninglessness or colonising gestures is real" ("Planetarity" 474). She thus calls for recapitulating the logic of modernism itself. Although multi-faced, the term has its own boundaries. Friedman points out that its inner logic builds on "the far-reaching implications of the linkage of modernism with modernity" ("Planetarity" 474), regarding the term as the aesthetic dimension of any given modernity. Her formulation thus solves the problem of the inclusiveness of this term by linking it to modernity. It also balances the aesthetic and political significance in this term, and it solves the problem of periodisation and geography of this term by dismantling the temporal and spatial boundaries of the conventional Western-centred definition.

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<sup>38</sup> Susan Friedman points out that this definition with a fixed time span obviously privileges Anglo-American modernism. See the details in Susan S. Friedman's "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies" (2006).

Roger A. Salerno, a scholar who holds similar ideas to Friedman, provides sociological insights into the relationship between modernity and modernism in *Landscapes of Abandonment: Capitalism, Modernity, and Estrangement* (2003). Because modernity is a loose concept, Salerno's observations help to narrow this term down, defining modernity as a quality of life that is associated with modernisation. He claims that modernity is

a set of features that are a result of social forces—the most significant of which are capitalistic development and the Enlightenment project. The values that guide it are parallel to those that govern capitalistic development and those characteristic[s] of the Enlightenment itself: total conquest and control of nature, the dismantling of tradition-based relationships, the veneration of power, the ascent of secular individualism, an intensification of bureaucratization, a heightened emphasis on binary opposition, rationality in the service of personal industry, and a morality governed by competitive self-interest. (37-38)

Modernity begins with the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In this sense, according to Salerno, both Romanticism and modernism are the aesthetic responses to modernity. The difference is that modernism, emerging from more radical changes along with the rapid capitalistic development after the Second Industrial Revolution, is more radical and more self-reflexive (43).

Friedman and Salerno's theories shed light on an observation of the hybridity of the modernism in Chinese context. Although the modernist works of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot were introduced in China around the 1920s and inspired their Chinese followers' works, an open and objective discussion of the nature and practice of modernism in the Chinese context only emerged during the 1980s. The conventional definition of modernism within a Western critical framework thus affected on the discussion of the existence of Chinese modernism and

its periodisation for decades. At the beginning of this debate, some scholars claimed that modernism in China in terms of the conventional Western definition, did not exist. However, development of the understanding of the term itself provides a more liberal approach to this matter. Acknowledging the hybridity in Chinese modernisation, scholars turn to support the applicability of modernity/modernism to Chinese literature. Chen Sihe, who published an essay “Modernism in the Development of Chinese Literature” (“Zhongguo Wenxue Fazhan zhong de Xiandaizhuyi”) (1985) in *Shanghai Literature*, did the ground-breaking work inside China. Rey Chow’s work in *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (1991) paves the way for theoretical studies in modernity/modernism in the Chinese context. Locating modern China in the context of the multi-culture formed by the dialectic between the East and the West, her study provides an important paradigm for the study of the modernity/modernism in a Chinese context. Eric Hayot speaks highly of her work and remarks that this book provides a new model for East/West comparative study (100). Michel Hockx, as one of the advocates outside of China, refutes the denial of modernism in China in his essay titled “The Modernity of the Early Chinese Modern Poetry” (“Zhongguo Zaoqi Xiandai Shige Zhong De Xiandaixing”) (1996)<sup>39</sup>. In the twenty-first century, studies of modernism in the Chinese context, accompanied by the globalisation of the term modernism, gains new perspectives. Shu-mei Shih’s *The Lure of The Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (2001), distinguishing the term in both global and local use by emphasising the transitional features of Chinese society (the co-existence of feudalism, capitalism and imperialism) in the first half of the twentieth century, sets a new milestone on this subject. In “Modernisms’ Chinas: Introduction” (2006), Eric Hayot concluded with a positive answer to the existence of modernism in the Chinese context. Recently, the scholar Wang Ning posits that Chinese modernity and modernism is

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<sup>39</sup> Although the author used modernity in the title, it was actually to some extent more related to modernism.

based on translation in his essay “Multiplied Modernities and Modernisms?” (2007), corresponding to Friedman’s observation from the ‘outside’ of Western culture. Wang Ning’s work departs from the debate of the existence of modernism in local terms and aims to configure the role of Chinese modernist practice according to a global modernism. These studies comprehensively suggest the commensurability of the term modernism as an aesthetic response to modernity in both Western and Chinese contexts.

Based on Friedman and Salerno’s theories, I treat modernism as a context embracing aesthetic, historical and cultural significance, responding to radical social and economic changes. This formulation thus contextualises the poetry of ‘new beauty’ and the life of the poets in relation to modernism. Modernism, in this formulation, becomes a crucible and demonstrates the chemical process of the production of the poetry of ‘new beauty’. By means of this formulation, based on Ronald Schleifer’s account of abundance in *Modernism and Time* (2000), this thesis argues that the poetry of ‘new beauty’ responds to the context of modernism in an aesthetic and discursive way.

Firstly, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ as a linguistic experiment created a new aesthetic poetic form in response to the changed perception of the external world during the time. The explosion of commodities and urbanisation, for instance, profoundly changed the perception of time. A sense of discontinuity questioned the long-held Newtonian mechanical time, inevitably producing discontinuous subjective experience. As Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane argue, the modernist aesthetic “respond[s] to our scenario of our chaos” (27). As for literature, the transformation or break in modernism specifically refers here to experimental linguistic forms. H.D. attempts to revive ‘beauty’ to accommodate the mechanical and chaotic feelings of the time; Chen appeals to ‘beauty’ to recover a truthful reality for the chaotic world. Both experimented with language, creating estranged images of



‘new beauty’. Therefore, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ is an aesthetic response to the perceptual changes in the context of modernism.

Secondly, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ responds to the radical social changes in human relationships. Virginia Woolf in her essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924) claims that all human relations shifted in the context of modernism:

All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature. Let us agree to place one of these changes about the year 1910. (422)

These changes, such as farmers entering cities and becoming industrial workers and women altering the domestic structure by attempting to find a job outside the family, had a profound impact on modernisation. Raymond Williams explores these changes and the decisive relation between the practices and ideas of avant-garde movements and metropolis in *The Country and the City* (1973) and in his essay “The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism” (1985).

However, this thesis focuses primarily on the changes to gender relationships—particularly the emergence of the group of the *New Woman*, which first appeared in Sarah Grand’s “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” in 1894. As I argue, the “New Woman” emerged from the undermining of rigid patriarchy, which is seen as a social symbolism which establishes gendered authority in this thesis.

The New Woman as a new social category marked the modernisation of gender relationship and reflected a group of female subjects who demanded the symbolic expression of their own voices. In *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism, and International Consumer Culture, 1880–1930* (2004), Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham remark:

Since the 1970s, the literary and cultural politics of the turn-of-the-century New Woman have received increasing academic attention. Whether she is seen as the emblem of sexual anarchy, an agent of mediation between mass market and modernist cultures, or as a symptom of the consolidation of nineteenth and early twentieth-century political liberation movements, the New Woman represents a site of cultural and socio-political contestation and acts as a marker of modernity. (1)

Salerno points out that the development of capitalism changes social relations and destabilises society. However, the instability of society produces crises as well as opportunities. The constant threat of meaninglessness caused by radical social changes causes anxiety on the one hand, and provides opportunities to redefine meanings, on the other. Women, as outsiders to symbolism, thus have the opportunity to construct their own meanings in the context of modernism. Accordingly, women gained the opportunity to free themselves from rigid patriarchal relationships and to articulate from a female-centred perspective.<sup>40</sup> Standing on the edge of a traditional world, New Women artists shared the aesthetic revolutionary nature of the time with their male contemporaries by aesthetic experiments. Moreover, they challenged the gender hierarchy prescribed by the traditional world in the same manner. H.D. and Chen, cultivated and living as New Women, wrote the poetry of ‘new beauty’ to empower themselves and their contemporaries. In this sense, estrangement in the poetry of ‘new beauty’ is not only a poetic device to redefine the aesthetic concept of beauty but also a political instrument to redefine the concept of women.

Formally speaking, estrangement reveals an aesthetic novelty, introducing fresh aesthetic experience by defamiliarising habitual images. Because beauty is an aesthetic

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<sup>40</sup> The freedom discussed here is in a relative and a specific way. For the majority of women, they were still suffering from domestication and confinement. Although gender-relations changed and the patriarchy became more loose in the context of modernism, the former still dominated society both in the Western world and China, according to the historical materials provided by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) and Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua in *Emerging from the Horizon of the History* (*Fu chu Lishi Dibiao*) (1989).

category, the difference presented by the estranged images that represent ‘new beauty’ reflects the two poets’ aesthetic pursuit, creating new images to manifest their conception of beauty. In this sense, estrangement creates ‘real’ beauty which embodies directness, and a temporary beauty reflecting their own time.

Discursively speaking, estrangement is a linguistic means to make visible the conflict between the old and the new, reflecting the dynamic between individual subjective experience and the knowledge anchored in established symbolism. As Douglas Robinson suggests, estrangement is a means to interrupt and obstruct shared feeling, which demonstrates a comparison between “familiar and strange”, “local and foreign”, “own and alien” and “conventional and experimental” (xii). W. Wolfgang Holdheim illustrates this dynamic in poetic estrangement explicitly:

It concerns the way in which a writer has to create within his given tradition of style. Traditions are subject to petrification. In literature, this means stylistic automatization: expressions and constructions become predictable, pale, stereotyped, and thus lose all visibility and concreteness; ... The poet has to disautomatize his medium. He therefore subjects it to syntactic, semantic, and metaphorical shifts. Constructions are unhinged, expressions wrenched out of their accustomed prosaic contexts. Through this estrangement of the familiar, this constant violation of the horizon of expectations, language is made visible (palpable) once again. (320)

Accordingly, estrangement as a channel enables the poets’ subjectivities in their judgments of ‘new beauty’ to enter their poetry, reflecting the ‘real’ relationship between the poets and their external world. By means of estrangement, Chen and H.D. are able to articulate their own voices. In their discursive field, beauty is attached to gender. Discourse analysis thus reveals that occupying different positions in social relations can fundamentally alter the

expression of the judgment of beauty. My argument is that that conventionalised beauty centres on a male perspective while the 'new beauty' is associated with a female-centred judgment. Given the connection between beauty and women, estrangement thus helps the poets to redefine themselves as women by redefining beauty. 'New beauty' thus responds to their situations, the condition of their existence. Estrangement in the images of 'new beauty' thus is the approach of establishing a feminist discourse which assists in constructing women's subjectivity. Discourse analysis suggests positing 'new beauty' is more than a revising of aesthetic tradition. It is also a discursive strategy for women to fight for a position to articulate their own aesthetic and political voices. Thus, estrangement as a revolutionary power links women to the aesthetic experiments of modernism thereby bringing into dialectical relation between the aesthetic and gender-politics.

From this discursive perspective, I argue that estrangement empowers not only beauty, as an aesthetic category, but also women, by empowering formerly conventionalised beautiful objects. The empowerment of beauty empowers women, because the ensuing estrangement liberates women from their bodily and social constraints through defeminisation. In this sense, the images of 'new beauty' symbolise the actualisation of what Simone de Beauvoir conceives of as women's transcendence, that is, a positive mode of women's embodied and intellectual existence. Acknowledging the multiple meanings and usage of this concept in philosophy, my concern of transcendence in this thesis is its moral values derived from its association with goodness and going beyond the boundaries of culture-bound human bodies.

The existentialist model of transcendence developed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) has been used in this thesis to account for the empowerment leading to a process of women's transcendence, women's self-accomplishment, in the poetry of 'new beauty'. In *Transcendence: On Self-determination and Cosmopolitanism* (2010), Mitchell

Aboulafia points out that the understanding of transcendence has experienced a significant change in Western philosophy since the turn of the twentieth century. During this transformation, existentialism plays an important role, since in Sartre's view, the human being, rather than God, is the concern of transcendence. In other words, to transcend becomes a fulfilment of human beings. However, Sartre's conception of transcendence remains related to consciousness while Beauvoir conceives transcendence as an ongoing human practice. In the latter's formulation, transcendence thus is not a metaphysical concept but a mode of existence. Her formulation attributes transcendence to every subject, since the latter is a practice of all human beings. In other words, this understanding of transcendence acknowledges that every human being can be an agent. Beauvoir's formulation thus returns the possibility of transcendence to women, breaking the transcendence-masculinity link and empowering them in the process.

H.D. and Chen's response to modernism, through aesthetics to politics, echoes that sense of democratic modernism posited by Rachel Potter in *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture, 1900-1930* (2006), which is in marked contrast to the totalitarianism expressed in the practice of the *Men of 1914*. For males, the chaos of the war and the consequence of the collapse of the stable order could be threatening but for women, the chaos meant an opportunity to reorganise and construct a new order. At this point, I argue that the poetry of 'new beauty' forms a mode of feminist discourse through aesthetic revolution.

In this thesis, I further narrow this context of modernism down to war time. Written during war, the poetry of 'new beauty' is inevitably a response to its chaos. In this sense, I situate H.D.'s writing in its World War I (1914-1918) background and situate Chen's, in China's "War of Resistance Against Japan" (1937-1945) (hereafter War of Resistance). War intensifies social changes and the perception of fragmentation. For both poets, the threat from war broke the prosperity of the art circle and damaged established aesthetic rules. More

important, the rigidity of patriarchal society was undermined during war time. Thus, historical conditions encouraged them to search for new meanings.

In this sense, the poetry of 'new beauty' as an exploration based on poetic estrangement reveals an aesthetic from a female-centred perspective which informs a female-centred view of the external world. Based on the Kantian theory of beauty, I argue that the concept of 'new beauty' is the judgement of beauty. By referring to the theoretical framework of studying poetic language, I argue that the poetry of 'new beauty' is a discourse of beauty which constructs a new female subject position by poetic estrangement. The theories of modernism give a social-historical context for this study. These three theoretical frameworks help me to return the images of 'new beauty' to their signifying process. To begin my inquiry, I contextualise the poetry of 'new beauty' in H.D. and Chen's personal struggle for poetic autonomy and independence and reveal the place where their embodied experience in the external world comes into being, before presenting their poetry in Chapter Three.

## Chapter Two: The Pursuit of a Free Voice: Anxiety and Struggle

This chapter contextualises the writing of the poetry of ‘new beauty’ in H.D. and Chen’s early poetic careers and reveals the formation of the female-centred position in the writing of both. By locating the poetry of ‘new beauty’ in their living situations, this chapter shows that the poetry of ‘new beauty’ reflects and responds to the poets’ concrete conditions of existence. In so doing, I suggest that the former’s emergence is based on a shift of viewpoint from seeing the internal and external world from a male-centred stance, to a female-centred one. In other words, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ provides a new narrative of the external world by a direct connection between female bodies and the world without the interception made by a patriarchal screen. At this point, I argue that the poetry of ‘new beauty’ reflects their poetic autonomy which is derived from the freedom of their female bodies.

### 2.1 The Anxiety of Aphasia: articulation of the gendered bodily ‘reality’

As Ewa Ziarek asserts in her book *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism* (2012), gender is a condition of literary production (11). My study in this chapter thus is an examination of this condition and its influence on H.D. and Chen’s writing. The anxiety of aphasia here thus refers to the dilemma of women who attempt to articulate and express themselves independently at the forefront of the modern social revolution.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar propose the idea of the battle between the two sexes during the twentieth century in *No Man’s Land* (1988), the sequel to *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

The starting point of my inquiry thus is the contradiction between the regulation implicit in social rules and the self-conscious articulation of actual experience based on female practice. This contradiction causes the anxiety of women's aphasia. *Aphasia*, literally the forgetting of language, here means the anxiety of losing the ability of free articulation. In this thesis, I define free articulation as the subjective response to and reflection of the perceiving subject on the external world: this free articulation reflects the subject's conditions of existence. In this sense, it is based on bodily reflective and reflexive processes. This articulation in this thesis refers to literary creativity in particular poetry.

Gender as a condition of existence is the key to understand the bodily 'reality' of women. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical inquiry of the female body and its situation from an existentialist perspective provides insights into and evidence of the gender influence on human perception and cognition. She argues that the body is the instrument of human beings to establish relations with the external world. She writes that "it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects" (46); however, a female body, as Beauvoir points out, is not always directly and freely related to the external world as is a male body, because of the social mechanism that aims to form and maintain male supremacy. This mechanism, appropriating power over women by the male collective is termed as patriarchy within feminist theory and praxis (56).<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the formation of the knowledge based on the female bodily practice is historically and socially impeded and concealed. In other words, patriarchy formulates one form of reality based on the male practice and conceals the reality of the female. In patriarchal society, power subjugates and objectifies women by removing their subjectivity. In the same vein, Rita Felski argues that gender is an important dimension that shapes our view of the world. She writes in *The Gender of Modernity* (2009):

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<sup>42</sup> Patriarchy is not a univocal term. Pavla Miller's study investigates the meaning of this term in different contexts. In this thesis, I borrow the definition by feminist discourse. See the details in her book *Patriarchy* (2017).



“Gender affects not just the factual content of historical knowledge—what is included and what gets left out— but also the philosophical assumptions underlying our interpretations of the nature and meaning of social processes.” (2) In this sense, I address the difference of gendered bodily experience as one that is not only based on the biological sexual difference between male and female but also the difference caused by their social positions. Gender influences the way of thinking because of the bodily situation; accordingly, women have their own reality to articulate, whether it agrees or disagrees with men’s. In this sense, women’s free articulation is their resistance to domestication and objectification by communicating their singular bodily reality. My focal point in this chapter is how the patriarchal society institutionalises the female body in order to impede their autonomous articulation. I return to the discussion of bodily reality to reveal how it is concealed by masculinist discourse in Chapter Five. Thus, I attempt to configure the social constraints exerted on women’s free articulation by symbolism and institutions, particularly patriarchal families in both H.D. and Chen’s cases, by contextualising the two poets in the rigid patriarchal society at the time: both before and during the wars which these two poets encountered.

Modern feminist studies have revealed that patriarchy creates a symbolic screen to separate women’s bodies and the external world. By this separation, women are regulated to see and understand the world from patriarchy authorities. This separation functions through patriarchal institutions, fundamentally, the patriarchal family. Family, in terms of Kate Millett’s study in *Sexual Politics* (1972), is the chief institution of patriarchy (33) and in the first half of the twentieth century, this tradition remained dominant. In effect, the patriarchal family system formulated a secondary position for women at home and confined them to it, since women had been historically assigned domestic duties which originated from the labour division ascribed to gender in primitive human social practice but became exacerbated following the Industrial Revolution. By reviewing prehistoric and ethnographic data in the

light of existentialist philosophy, Beauvoir, an exemplar of mid-century feminist critics, reveals that the moral prestige of men at the outset along with their physical strength led to male supremacy in society and this supremacy is fixed by the patriarchal family system. This family structure was customised as a tradition, hence she predicts that women remain alienated when the family and private patrimony continue to exist.<sup>43</sup> In terms of Beauvoir's observation, family in this patriarchal tradition was formed as the intermediary between women and a society that aimed to isolate them from public participation. In this sense, women controlled by the family system could only understand and communicate with the external world through the males in their family, such as father or husband (75; 488-491). In other words, because the father or husband was the mouthpiece of the family, it was extremely difficult for women's voices to be articulated and heard. In *Emerging from the Horizon of History (Fu chu Lishi Dibiao)* (1989), Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua provide a similar explanation of the male-dominated family structure in Chinese traditional society. By extracting the rules in canonical texts of Confucianism, Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua reveal how the subordinate position of women in the family is interwoven in the consciousness of Chinese culture through the domination of Confucian discourse which promotes a strict patriarchal, family-based morality. For instance, the two authors exemplify the principle of family recorded in *The Book of Rite (Li Ki or Li Ji)*<sup>44</sup> to demonstrate that a strict line between public affairs and family affairs was required. In the Book X of *The Book of Rite, The Pattern of the Family*, it notes that "the men should not speak of what belongs to the inside (of the house), nor the women of what belongs to the outside... Things spoke inside should not go out, words spoken outside should not come in" (454-455). They also reveal that by constructing and grounding the identity of women in the family, their existence as

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<sup>43</sup> Beauvoir provides an explicit examination on the forming of women's secondary position in society through history. See the details in *The Second Sex*. pp. 63-151.

<sup>44</sup> *The Book of Rites* is a diverse collection of texts of varied but uncertain origin and date. The popular version of this book is considered to be compiled by Dai Sheng in the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC – 9 AD).

independent entities was obliterated. At the same time this injustice was disguised in the celebration of the value and meanings of family (4). In this way, women in traditional Chinese culture were excluded from society. Subject to patriarchal family structure then, women's voices were discouraged, if not entirely deprived of, expression.

In addition, women bonded to the territory of home by the socially prescribed duties of housework and reproduction were limited in their participation in social activities, such as study and writing. Woolf raises the question of "what had our mothers been doing then that they had no wealth to leave us?" and then shows how throughout history the duty of reproduction and caring for children left them little in the way of external achievement and independence (*A Room of One's Own* 12). Beauvoir similarly observes that women were "locked" in (or out) by their domestic labour and points out that housework as a passive activity impedes self-development (75). As a result, home as a self-perpetuating institution offering no alternatives became the only place for them.

This intention of separation is underpinned by moralising the rigid bond between women and domesticity and treating those who attempted to cross the boundary punitively. That is, male-dominated culture imposed punishment on women who attempted to squeeze themselves into the field of cultural and intellectual production. When women demonstrated their alternative capabilities and intelligence, male anxiety and resistance took the form of stigmatisation and hence, isolation. Woolf, for instance, acutely observes that men were terrified of the independent and intellectual women and thus "the convention of disgust toward the woman who drew public attention formed" (*A Room of One's Own* 32). This system praises the one who voices the male voice and demonises the one who articulates her female 'reality'. Beauvoir terms it, the myth of women in *The Second Sex*. She explains how women are fixed into stereotypes by the imagination of males and this imagination is used to undergird male privilege in society. She argues:

Thus, to the dispersed, contingent and multiple existence of *women*, mythic thinking opposes the Eternal Feminine, unique and fixed; if the definition given is contradicted by the behaviour of real flesh-and-blood women, it is women who are wrong.... To posit the Woman is to posit the absolute Other, without reciprocity, refusing, against experience, that she could be a subject, a peer. (275).

In this sense, Beauvoir insightfully points out that men established their self-assurance and self-affirmation by depriving women of agency. In the same vein, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar reveal the double-image of women as “angel and monster” portrayed by male writers in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). They argue that male artists create these two extreme images of women to “lessen their dread of her ‘inconstancy’ and-by identifying with the ‘eternal types’ they have themselves invented-to possess her more thoroughly” (17). Their discovery suggests that women living in a strict patriarchal society, such as in nineteenth century English society, could not be allowed to have a personal will and voice expressed in public. Otherwise, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, they were estranged from society as madwomen. Creating two contrasting models of women, patriarchal society establishes and consolidates through education the norm of so-called ‘good’ women. This ideology thus oppressed their free articulation.

Moreover, the history of a tradition which silenced women’s expression in social and intellectual life became another obstruction in itself. In other words, women who attempted to articulate themselves confronted a history of silence. Excluded from literary tradition, historically suppressed and neglected as writers, the odds against beginning to write and further, gaining recognition as a writer, were overwhelming. In 1928, Woolf revealed the irony that while women as subjects were prevalent in men’s writing, especially in literary genres, they were absent in history. She further noticed that one could easily find a book about women written by men but there were few written by women (*A Room of One’s Own*

16). Twenty years later, Beauvoir elucidated the silence of women in history by applying an existentialist approach supported by abundant anthropological material in *The Second Sex*. She discovered that women had been at the fringe of history for a long time and that the entire history of women had been up until that time, written by men (150-153). In *Emerging from the Horizon of History* (1989), Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua reveal a similar history of silence surrounding Chinese women and claim that women's voices were obliterated over a five-thousand-year period (4). Clearly, the history of silence becomes a tradition for women which shadows them, preventing them from having access to methods and examples from the past to build on.

To summarise: this gender-driven condition that separated women's bodies and voices from exposure in the public sphere causes the anxiety of aphasia by the contradiction between individual wills and social constraints. The anxiety of aphasia is socially rooted in the conflict between poetic autonomy and freedom of women and the constraint on their articulation from a male-dominated culture, which discourages female artists' articulation by conventionalising and legitimating patriarchal social practice. Confined to a domestic life, women living in a rigid patriarchal society could not freely articulate their voices, not only because they were externally restricted by the lack of social and material resources but equally because they were hesitant and anxious about creating—out of an absence—a voice of their own.

The separation deepens the anxiety because it cuts women's direct connection to the external world which obscures understanding of their internal and external world. In other words, this anxiety is psychologically caused by the uncertainty of self-understanding, namely the ability to intellectually grasp one's own conditions of existence. The self-understanding of a poet thus includes the knowledge of one's character, nature, and surroundings. This is important for writers, especially poets, who write to communicate their experiences.

Studies of anxiety over creative writing show that it stems from the writers' self-certainty, the confidence in their originality and creativity. Harold Bloom's study of poetic anxiety based on psychoanalytic models in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) posits that the anxiety of poets over writing is the anxiety of influence which concerns originality and authority (57). Anxiety, according to Harold Bloom, is thus a psychological mechanism of self-defence, or a symptom of it, where poetry is the anxiety itself (95). Bloom, unsurprisingly, regards writing poetry as a form of self-recognition and self-realisation. The creativity of a poet is thus grounded on self-begetting, namely self-understanding and self-realisation (37). In this sense, writing poetry is a psychological process which reflects the poet's knowledge of self and her/his response to surroundings. Bloom terms this process "the second birth" of a poet (25), and therefore, any confusion in self-understanding will be more likely to produce the anxiety of aphasia in writing poetry, that is, the fear of ceasing to write.

Although the anxiety of free and thorough expression accompanies every writer's process of writing all along, gendered situations complicate the writing of women poets. Living in a strict patriarchal society, women encountered intense inner conflict when attempting to achieve similar self-recognition; the fear of losing the capability of writing being doubled by their gender. Unable to adequately judge their self-worth and the worth of their poetry, women lived in contradiction, hovering between two value systems: the value of their own worth and the patriarchal values which denied it. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar take a cultural approach to examine the anxiety of writing in women writers in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that is based on Bloom's reading of anxiety. They specify that the anxiety of influence in women's writing process is the anxiety of authorship, concerning the legitimization of women's writing. Their study has revealed the many social and cultural obstacles imposed on female creativity (4-5). Gilbert and Gubar subsume the anxiety of women writers under two types of conflict: the conflict between the profession of writing and

the female gender; and that between poetry as a male-dominated genre and women's actual poetic practice (67). In their argument, the anxiety of women poets over creativity is caused by the suppressive influence of the patriarchal tradition. Although they admit that the notion of authorship is problematic and outdated under the terms of post-modern and deconstructive discourse, their observation that the anxiety of women writers caused by their gendered situations is nonetheless, still relevant.<sup>45</sup> This predicament is also explicitly revealed by Suzanne Juhasz when she presents a gendered critique of the nature of poetry (2).<sup>46</sup> Juhasz contends that poetry is the most intense form of self-articulation the writing of which demands a strong ego. However, since women were not granted licence to voice their poetic perceptions publicly, and thus were unable to legitimate meanings and values derived from their own experience, in patriarchal society it became well-nigh impossible for them to construct a strong ego (2). Their self-articulation became naturally impeded by a sense of confusion.

In this sense, women poets underwent an anxiety of aphasia, a fear of losing their own voice in the process of writing (or not being able to write). The anxiety of aphasia for women poets thus encompasses two aspects: the fear of losing autonomy and freedom to articulate and the uncertainty of their writing. The gendered anxiety of aphasia thus involves for women who wished to become writers, a self-censorship (the possibility of writing) and a self-criticism when they did write poetry (the ability to write). This situation is also confirmed by the observation of Virginia Woolf, the harbinger of modern feminist literary critics, a writer in the early twentieth century. In her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

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<sup>45</sup> Sandra Gilbert reflects on the term authorship in their early study and acknowledges its inadequacy in the post-modernist discourse in the introduction to the second edition of *The Madwoman in the Attic* (xxxviii). Annette Federico also reflects on this matter and defends Gilbert and Gubar's book for its aesthetic concern in the introduction "'Bursting All the Doors': The Madwoman in the Attic after Thirty Years" to the book *The Madwoman in the Attic after Thirty Years* (10).

<sup>46</sup> In this book, Suzanne Juhasz asserts that a new poetic tradition based on women's bodily experiences formed in the twentieth century.

Woolf vividly describes this gender-linked anxiety over writing poetry by asking the incisive question: “who is able to measure the heat and violence of the poet’s heart when caught and tangled in a woman’s body?” (31) Woolf’s question reveals that women poets were strictly restrained in self-expression because of their gender, this restraint being their primary bodily experience at that time.

## 2.2 Between the Freedom and The Control: the anxiety and melancholy of H.D. and Chen

The situation of women’s subjugation came to a turning point in the context of modernism. The development of capitalism and the corresponding spread of the idea of women’s equal rights destabilised the rigidity of traditional patriarchy. This new condition placing women poets in a borderline between freedom and domination increased their anxiety of aphasia. I will elucidate this by contextualising H.D. and Chen.

Women at that time gained more freedom inside and outside the family in both H.D. and Chen’s early years. On the one hand, this freedom was propelled by the social economic and political development in the process of modernisation. With respect to Anglo-English society, freedom was a fruit of the women’s suffrage movement. As Ewa Ziarek points out in her book *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism* (2012), women’s suffrage is the primary political condition for women’s literary production in Western modernism (19-20). Elizabeth Ammons provides a clear outline for the optimistic atmosphere in American society in *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (1993). She writes:

The Progressive Era, spanning at its broadest from the early 1890s through the middle 1920s, was for many American women a time of struggle and change. Books and



journal articles proliferated on the woman question, which encompassed everything from dress reform to the vote. Women pursued college and advanced degrees at unprecedented rates, increasing their enrolment in the first two decades of the twentieth century in public colleges by 1,000 percent, in private colleges by 482 percent. New occupations opened up— typewriting, stenography, department store clerking, trained nursing— into which ambitious young women were beckoned and, especially if they were white, welcomed. (5)

In China, the equality of women as a political issue became attached to a nationalist discourse, as one of the paths to realise Chinese modernisation and salvation. In the introduction to *Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (2008), the editors, Qian Nanxiu, Grace S. Fong and Richard Smith, argue that this change is initiated by westernised modernisation caused by the shock of China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). In this book, they enumerate radical changes for women's appearance in public sphere since then, such as the establishment of women's institutions and the emergence of modern media for women's publications (11-17). These changes initiated women's self-consciousness and provided possibilities for them to achieve a degree of self-accomplishment.

However, the freedom of women was limited. Women at that time still suffered from patriarchal domination in family and the haunting of the history of muteness. Roger Salerno points out that the bourgeois nuclear family increased the oppression by maintaining a hold on patriarchal ideology. He elucidates:

One of the primary functions of modern families has been cultural reproduction, that is the reproduction of cultural patterns within the individual. Therefore, not only does the family reproduce a primary factor of production—namely labor, but it also

promotes the ideology associated with that method... It has been proposed that the heightened focus on individuation, patriarchy, and sexual control in modern families helps to establish an intensity of anxiety. (87)

In the nuclear family, women's domestic responsibilities were heavily stressed. According to Helen M. Schneider's *Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China* (2008), this new form of patriarchal family was also introduced in Chinese society to replace the traditional familial structure at the turn of the twentieth century. Related to the nationalist discourse again, this familial system was associated with the issue of how to build a better China. As a result, women's domestic role was unfairly linked to their responsibilities for society and contributions to the nation.

Influenced by the interplay between freedom and control, women were more sensitive to the anxiety of aphasia, especially those who aimed to pursue a profession of creative writing. Like their other contemporaries, H.D. and Chen's writing at an early stage was subject to this gender constraint and carried a similar historical baggage. As a consequence, they too wrote with this anxiety of aphasia.

The uncertainty of their own existence and their own capabilities of writing poetry as women is revealed by the sceptical attitude of H.D. and Chen towards the performance of their literary practice.

H.D.'s uncertainty of self is manifested in dramatic self-contradiction where she evaluated her writing in excessive terms, with either extreme doubt or absolute optimism. According to Barbara Guest, John Gould Fletcher noticed H.D.'s anxiety at the start of her career. He noted that she was never sure that anything she had ever written had been good (43). The correspondence between H.D. and John Cournos in 1915 reveals the former's

ambivalent attitude to both her works and her own state of being. In these letters, she openly confided to her friend about her anxiety over writing:

I have all faith in my work. What I want at times is to feel faith in my self, in my mere physical presence in the world, in my personality. I feel my work is beautiful, I have a deep faith in it, an absolute faith. But sometimes I have no faith in my self. (qtd. in Guest 79-80)

This quotation exposes the complicated relation between H.D.'s self-doubt and her critical evaluation of her poetry. Ostensibly, her words in the letter show her confidence in writing. However, the claim of faith is an ambivalent one. The word "but" suggests a connection between the perceived judgment of the self and the poetry. In fact, the statement that stresses the nature of the self-doubt in the final sentence has the uneasy effect of rendering all her previous claims of faith unreliable. In addition, the hysterical repetition of the statement of having faith in her work ironically reveals her doubt about it.

Uncertainty of self, in Chen's case, is manifested by her humility. Chen's humility, more than a courtesy or a virtue, is a form of conscious self-effacement and self-marginalisation, reflecting an inclination to conceal her presence from the public, or, to draw the least attention to herself. Unlike H.D.'s anxiety, explicitly recorded in person or by others, Chen's self-doubt is manifested by the absence of records. Chen left only a few words directly recording her thoughts and deeds during her time in Beijing. It is, however, the lack of a personal record that exposes the uncertainty she has of herself through deliberate self-effacement. As a participator in and witness of the flourishing literary market in Beijing in the 1930s, Chen publicly performed only the role of an observer. She documented the events of the poetic society and the activity of other poets but avoided writing about her own activities. For example, she wrote an essay titled "The Remembrance of *Mercury*" ("Huai

Shuixing”) to remember the influential literary journal published in Beijing between 1934 and 1935. The revelations of many details about this journal in the essay suggests that Chen was closely associated with *Mercury*, its editors and contributors, but she did not disclose this. Only once in her memoir to commemorate the poet He Qifang “He was Once Singing Like This” (“Ta Cengjing Zheyang Gechang”) does she mention her friendship with this renowned poet, describing herself as a naïve girl when she first met and learnt from him (707).

Recent studies and unearthed pieces of her writing and biography justify and attest to Chen’s importance in and contribution to modern Chinese poetry. Critics have noticed that the lack of records and documents has resulted in a corresponding underestimation of Chen’s poetry and the subsequent neglect of her importance in Chinese literary history. Zhao Yiheng, defending Chen and justifying her poetic achievement, remarks that her memoir is to some extent disguised and sometimes deliberately tailored by omitting some details which “should not be” recorded according to the cultural conventions of the time (2), in “Biography between the Lines”, the preface to *The Collected Poems and Essays of Chen Jingrong (Chen Jingrong Shi Wen Ji)* (2008). As biographer, Chen Li speculates that the poet, in fact, had a strong tie with the eminent literary intellectuals in Beijing at that time and most likely participated in most of the important literary events, although there is no detailed record of this. The biographer argues that this wide contact with poets and literary editors at an early stage of her career enables Chen to become a key figure of the revival of Chinese poetic society in Shanghai after the War of Resistance in 1946 (“The Poetic Relation of Chen Jingrong to Tsinghua” 158-164). Her unduly modest narrative confirms the fact that women were subject to ideological constraints which required them to efface their presence in public. Willingly or not, to some extent, the poet conceals and distorts some of her ‘inappropriate’ deeds and

opinions to avoid criticism, suggesting that Chen doubted her presence as a woman because she was uncertain about the validity of her creative self in a patriarchal culture.

For this reason, the social restraints on women actually had the effect of intensifying the gaps and ambivalence present in self-understanding and produced both H.D. and Chen's anxiety of aphasia. However, from their poems written at that time, we can see the anxiety is caused by their experience of gender. The poems dealing with their feelings of doubt and frustration over gendered metaphors suggest that these reactions are caused by the difficult situation of women who attempted to lead an independent life as professional poets.

H.D.'s "Mid-Day", for instance, reveals women's frustration in contrast to the bright situation of men. In this poem, women are represented as shaken-off seed-pods, splitting their shrivelled seeds on the path; men, in contrast, are metaphorised as bright and great poplars. The first stanza sets the melancholy tone for this poem. The poet writes the last line of this stanza as "I am anguished—defeated". She contrasts the seed-pods to poplars in spatial positions and in appearance. The seed-pods are clearly in a lower position, while the poplars are "far beyond". The seed-pods are drying and dying, while the poplars are spreading their roots and are bright. To emphasise the differences and the relationship of inequality, this poem ends with a stark contrast:

O poplar, you are great  
among the hill-stones,  
while I perish on the path  
among the crevices of the rocks. (23-26)

In this contrast, the poet demonstrates her frustration and pain at being a woman poet who is inferior to her male contemporaries whose careers are optimistic and shining.

Similarly, Chen reveals the different prospects in life for women and men in “Window” (“Chuang”). In this poem, the destinies of men and women are respectively embodied in the images of “your window” and “my window”. In this way, the gender differences are reified by different views from each window. This poem starts like this: “Your window / opens towards the sun / towards the blue sky of April” (1-3). In contrast to this optimistic opening, this poem ends with the sense of frustration engendered by presenting a picture of “my window”. The poet writes: “but my window / opens towards the dark night / towards the silent starry sky” (28-30). This contrast between the views outside the windows suggests that the poet is aware of the vulnerability and difficulties that arise in her life pursuing a poetic career compared with her male contemporaries. This vulnerable position dismays her by shadowing and discouraging her chosen pursuit.

The ambiguity and doubt expressed in the two poets’ early *oeuvre* written relate their anxiety to their current gender position, functioning as a metaphor of their uncertainty as creative and intellectual women pursuing a poetic career. The poems analysed above expose how the privilege accorded to their male peers dismays them, a frustrating truth that threatens to drive both women into darkness, namely of that of ceasing to be a poet. At this stage, they experienced entrapment and could only write in a melancholic, passive way to respond to the conditions of their existence. To struggle for free articulation, these two poets endeavoured to explore new way to fully articulate their own bodily experiences and poetic vision.

### 2.3 Emergence of the Independent Voice: *three escapes* and poetic autonomy

Since the politics of gender produced what I have termed *the anxiety of aphasia*, both women were led to conduct *three escapes* from the restraints of male-authorities to gain their

independence and autonomy as women poets, a completion that restored their autonomy in writing. The poetry of ‘new beauty’ is the fruit, therefore, of such independent and autonomous articulation.

As the above analysis suggests, women poets needed to free themselves from the suppression of patriarchal ideology to overcome an anxiety of aphasia. In other words, they needed to be able to free themselves from the restraints on articulation imposed by patriarchal culture in order to achieve the goal of “positing oneself as a freedom”, a Beauvoirian formulation to release the potential of creativity in poets.<sup>47</sup> To achieve this, Beauvoir provides a suggestion that until an equality between sexes has been established, women need to be free from the customs and conventions cultivated in a male-dominant tradition, in particular from their confinement to the family and the burden of marriage. (154-159). In addition, women poets need to free themselves from male-domination in poetry. Practically speaking, H.D. and Chen performed the act of three escapes in their personal life: successively freeing themselves from their fathers, poetic mentors, and husbands. Through this brave action, they positioned their bodies directly in order to meet the external world and gain poetic/aesthetic and personal autonomy.

The first and primary escape for both poets lies in the escape from the power of the father, the sovereign of their respective paternal families; however, this rising self-consciousness deepened the contradiction between women and adult male family members. In turn, the anxiety of aphasia increased if their bodies remained institutionalised within the family. As Meng and Dai argues in *Emerging from the Horizon of History*, from the “father’s daughter” to “women” is a critical step for women who seek to write for themselves (14-17).

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<sup>47</sup> Beauvoir claims that “art, literature and philosophy are attempts to found the world anew on a human freedom: that of the creator, to foster such an aim, one must first unequivocally posit oneself as a freedom.” See this argument in details in *The Second Sex* (764-765).

The conflict between the pursuit of individual freedom and the constraints of traditional values urged them to flee in order to pursue an alternative life.

Both H.D. and Chen's families, belonged to the elite class of their respective societies and were strictly regulated by patriarchal family structures. In both families, the father figure was dominating but withdrawn while the mother figure was submissive, stranded in domesticity. The father, solemn and cold, owned absolute authority at home. Barbara Guest, H.D.'s biographer, describes a dinner scene at the Doolittles based on a recollection of William Carlos Williams, to demonstrate the absolute authority of Mr. Doolittle: "When they were at dinner and Mrs. Doolittle noticed that the Professor wished to speak, she would quickly announce: your father is about to speak! Silence immediately ensued." (17) Chen depicts a similar scene in her family in an autobiographical story named "The Father" ("Fuqin"). She presents the scene of a family gathering on a winter night. Because of the presence of her authoritarian father, the family fell into a "hateful silence". She recalls the violence performed by her father on her mother and confides her fear of him under the cover of this story. In this story, she criticises the extent to which a dominating father of a patriarchal family is a fundamental threat to family harmony. The family under the power of the father in this story is described as a strictly enclosed fortress, as Chen comments at the end of this essay that "the solemn night fortifies the old and spacious house" (555). The mother, on the other hand, devoted herself to the family at the expense of her own interests. In marriage, H.D.'s mother gave up her gifts of music and arts and shouldered the burdensome duties of housework, and similarly Chen's mother sacrificed the opportunity to receive a higher education for the sake of family.

Patriarchal family structure terrified both H.D. and Chen. On the one hand, the power of the father, suppressing the self-expression of other family members, inhibited the two young girls' freedom of speaking; on the other hand, the sacrifice of the mother, repressing



self-interests, threatened them as a mirror reflecting their own future as women. Disappointed with traditional domestic life, both H.D. and Chen yearned for an alternative. Moreover, H.D. and Chen, despite their creative intelligence, were subject to the strict and rigid domination of their respective fathers. H.D.'s father wished his only daughter could be a scientist like Marie Curie; however, carrying her father's dream, H.D. underwent a difficult time in college. The studious Chen received not support but discouragement from her father. He did not like his daughter to receive much education and disapproved of almost all her reading of poetry and fiction. In this respect, fathers as the authority in each family suppressed the young girls' interests and values.

To escape home to free themselves from paternal authority became the essential goal for both young women who dreamed of an independent and free life. Motivated by this pursuit, they each escaped from their families as soon as they had the opportunity. In 1911, H.D., aged twenty-six, decided to stay in London at the end of her trip around Europe. After that she never returned to her family home in Philadelphia. Similarly, Chen escaped from her family to Beijing in 1934 when she was seventeen. She never contacted her family again. The two women thus escaped from the prescribed lifestyle for women at that time and subsequently experienced the opportunity to read and write freely in the centre of their individual cultures. In this way, both poets liberated themselves from the confinement of their parental family and gained the opportunity to establish careers as poets.

The second crisis which H.D. and Chen encountered was the suppression exercised by poetic authority figures, namely their male mentors. The poetic careers of both H.D. and Chen were closely linked with their mentors: respectively Ezra Pound and Cao Baohua, both of whom were influential in their respective literary societies at that time. After escaping from home, both women enjoyed the freedom to read and write, but they quickly encountered another restraint upon their writing: they were asked to defer to male mentors. These men

designed their poetic knowledge and writing patterns and conducted the publication of their works. Under this surveillance, freedom of expression became an issue once more. The domination of mentors made their voices muddled. Thus, the intervention from these mentors led to the two poets' second escape.

H.D.'s poetic career was influenced by Pound in three ways. Pound systematically introduced literature, especially poetry, to her, revealing a new world to the then young girl. From this perspective, H.D. was guided and inspired by him. Guest comments that the awakening of H.D. as a poet reveals a debt to Pound (4; 8). According to Guest, H.D. knew little about literature and arts other than fairy tales, myths and music before she first met Pound at the age of fifteen. It was Pound who introduced fiction and poems to her and then taught her to write poetry. Pound not only introduced her to the troubadours of Provence, William Morris and Swinburne, but also taught her Latin and Greek poetry which sparked her first interest in ancient Greek culture. On the other side of the coin, Pound made H.D. his disciple. That is to say, Pound to some extent designed or fabricated the edifice of H.D.'s literary knowledge. As a result, her literary education was defined and prescribed by Pound, thus it was he who instilled his own notions of literary taste into her knowledge of literature. In this sense, she perceived a world through Pound's eyes.

Pound also introduced H.D. into a lively poetic circle in London and helped her to build up intellectual and social relations with eminent writers and critics at that time. He escorted and protected her during that time and claimed to be one of her "nearest male relatives" (Guest 32). With the help of the reassuring Pound, she overcame her initial shock and loneliness and felt that she was accepted by London, the heart of English culture. Guest provides the details of H.D.'s social achievement in her first year in London and credits it to Pound. By the end of 1911, she had been introduced to such writers as F. S. Flint, who was of key importance in founding Imagism, May Sinclair, the promoter of Imagism, Harold Monro,

the editor of *Poetry Review*, and the prominent poet William Butler Yeats (Guest 29). H.D., however, was overshadowed in this circle by the glamorous Pound, the rising star of London poetic society and could not avoid being labelled as “Pound’s girl”.

Furthermore, Pound promoted H.D.’s poetry by editing and publishing her poems. Being the initiator and agent, he thus played a decisive role in establishing her poetic career. On the one hand, Pound helped H.D. to improve her poetic skills in free verse, the form that his own poetic revolution took and that she followed. At the start, she frequently consulted him about her writing. In 1912, she moved to live at 6 Church Walk to become his neighbour, a move that inevitably enhanced their connection. On the other hand, Pound also refined and polished H.D.’s poems. Guest provides a vivid description of this, writing how “[Pound] takes out a sharp pencil, changes a word here or there, crosses one out. ... Selecting ‘Hermes of the Way’, and giving her one of his catlike looks, he again takes up his pencil and signs the poem: ‘H.D. Imagiste’” (40). After editing these three initial poems in 1912, Pound recommended them as the laconic speech of Imagism to Harriet Monroe, the editor of *Poetry*, a leading poetry magazine in America. In January 1913, the three poems were published in *Poetry* and marked H.D.’s debut as a poet with the name “H.D.” given by Pound. H.D. herself had little autonomy in the process of publication, since she did not choose the poems, the publishing institution, or even her pen name. This story of her first publication as a poet in London reveals the extent to which Pound exerted a profound influence on her poetry and her early poetic career which inevitably was overshadowed by becoming incorporated into Imagism and the practice of Pound’s poetics. H.D. was unavoidably influenced by Pound in her “Church Walk” apprenticeship and to some degrees adopted his revolutionary poetic ideas aiming to free English poetry from the Georgian influence fashionable at the time. More directly, critics have argued that H.D.’s early poetry clearly demonstrates examples of Pound’s distinctive style. For example, Hugh Kenner’s comparative study between H.D.’s

“Hermes of the Ways” and Pound’s “The Return” which were written at the same time reveals that the Pound poem nourishes H.D.’s writing (qtd. in Guest 45). For another thing, the publication of H.D.’s first three poems and the initiation of her poetic career is part of Pound’s Imagism schema. Linking the name of the poet and that of the new poetic movement, the signature “H.D. Imagiste” signed at the end of “Hermes of the Ways” that H.D.’s poetic debut and the launching of Imagism were conflated in his mind. In this sense, her early poetry is not an independent event but became a part of Pound’s poetic campaign. Labelling him as an entrepreneur, Guest describes Pound as an activist whose aim was to promote his revolutionary poetics using H.D.’s poetry as an exemplary demonstration of his movement. However, the independent values and meanings of her work were overshadowed by the grand and glamorous poetic revolution as claimed by Pound for Imagism. H.D. as an independent poet was marginalised.<sup>48</sup>

Out of this entanglement, a divergence between the doctrine of the mentor and self-awareness of the disciple emerged. H.D.’s aspiration was to write her real feelings and to detach her poetry from any particular movement. Therefore, a rupture grew between these two artists, especially when H.D. noticed that Pound’s manipulation of her poetry attempted to extend to her personal life. As Guest writes in her biography, Pound was possessive and his omnipotence became a “threat to her poetry” (54).

A similar entangled situation is the case with Chen’s relation to her mentor. Unlike H.D. who became a disciple of Pound only through an intimate and personal relationship, Chen was initially a student of Cao Baohua. The student-teacher relationship between Chen and Cao enhanced the hierarchy between them both intellectually and in life.

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<sup>48</sup> In “Gendering Modernism: H.D., Imagism and Masculinist Aesthetics”, Michael Kaufmann argues for H.D.’s creativity and independence in her early poetry and insists that Pound learnt the objective techniques in creating poetic images from her.

Cao guided Chen's literary reading and inspired her dream of being a poet. Cao was Chen's English teacher when they met in the early 1930s. Cao came back with a halo to his hometown Leshan, a remote small southwest town in Sichuan Province. At that time, he was one of the talented students of the renowned literary critic of *New Criticism* I. A. Richards from Tsinghua University and a published poet associated with the famous Crescent Moon School<sup>49</sup>. The young teacher from the cultural centre of China, talented and knowledgeable, thus won Chen's heart and naturally became her mentor. Chen Li, the biographer of the poet, provides an annotation for this romance, remarking that it is more likely that it was Cao's knowledge and civilized manners rather than any sexual charisma that attracted Chen ("The Poetic Relation of Chen Jingrong to Tsinghua" 162). Her mentor introduced an attractive world beyond the town and kindled the young girl's inner passions and hopes of becoming a poet. In this sense, Cao played the guide who would expand her provincial reading. She already had enormous enthusiasm for literature and had secretly read numerous poems and fictions in both classic and modern Chinese before she met him. Andrea Diane Lingenfelter and Meng Liansu have recorded this in detail. They mention that Chen had read the poetry of most eminent poets in modern Chinese poetry, such as Guo moruo, Bingxin, Wen Yiduo and Xu Zhimo, during her time at primary school.<sup>50</sup> Apart from being his student, Chen also worked as an assistant to him. Cao was at the time actively translating and introducing modern Western literary theories, such as New Criticism and French symbolism and Chen helped him with the transcribing. It is most likely that she read Western literature, such as the work of Emile Zola and Lord Byron and later the work of Charles Baudelaire and French

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<sup>49</sup> Crescent Moon School, led by the influential poets Wen Yiduo and Xue Zhimo, was influenced by Anglo-American literature. It focused on the aesthetic formalist experiment on poetry and profoundly improved the Chinese new poetry in both theory and praxis. See the details in Lawrence Wang-Chi Wong's article "Lions and Tigers in Group: The Crescent Moon School in Modern Chinese Literary History" collected in *Literary Societies of Republican China* (2008), pp. 279-312.

<sup>50</sup> See the details in Andrea D. Lingenfelter's "A Marked Category: Nine Women of Modern Chinese Poetry, 1920-1997" (1998) and Meng Liansu's "The Inferno Tango: Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917-1980" (2010).

Symbolism, with his encouragement. She may have known these writers and their works from either Cao's English class or her transcribing work for him. In this way, as Chen Li comments, Cao awakens and enlightens Chen through his extensive knowledge of Chinese and European literature ("The Poetic Relation of Chen Jingrong to Tsinghua" 162). The extensive reading of a sophisticated mix of poets laid a solid ground for her later poetic career.

From the time he observed Chen's talent and precocity Cao also provided strong support for her escape from home to receive higher education in Beijing, and her subsequent entrance to its literary circle. Chen's first attempt at escape accompanied by Cao occurred in 1932. Unfortunately, this was a failure. Chen was traced and returned home by her father and grounded for nearly a year. Her second escape in 1934, again sponsored by Cao, succeeded. In Beijing, Cao helped her to attend lectures in Tsinghua and Peking Universities and introduced her to the influential Beijing poetic society, where she met eminent poets and writers. Among them, the most influential are the renowned *Three Poets of Han Garden*: Bian Zhili, He Qifang and Li Guangtian, whose work marks the peak of Chinese poetry in the 1930s.

Cao maintained his position as a key figure in Chen's life by also initiating her poetic career. He introduced her poetry to the public through his influential role in bridging the circle of critics and writers in Beijing literary society. He promoted Chen's poems by publishing them in the literary section of newspapers such as *Tsinghua Weekly* and the *Academy of Peiping Morning Post*. After the failure of the first escape from home, Cao sent her poem "Disillusionment" ("Huanmie") to *Tsinghua Weekly* in 1934 to commemorate her bravery and this is considered to be her first publication. When Chen arrived in Beijing Cao also began to recommend her poetry to the *Academy of Peiping Morning Post* which was under his editorship. According to Chen Li's record, almost all of Chen's poems and prose

between May and October in 1935 were published under the editorship of Cao.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, he launched and promoted her poetic career; however, it is noteworthy that Chen was not entirely passive during this process but developed her own poetic styles and techniques and outgrew her mentor (Zhao 5; L. Chen “The Poetic Relation of Chen Jingrong to Tsinghua” 162).

The ostensible harmony in the relationship between Chen and Cao was disrupted by the ‘gender contest’ that intensified at the outbreak of the War of Resistance. In the war crisis, Chen as a woman poet lost her freedom to write poetry, sacrificing her writing for supporting Cao’s career. The pressure of living and surviving made Chinese society, especially those male intellectuals who had previously advocated democracy, withdraw their generosity to women. As a result, the space for women in society began to shrink. The ensuing financial crisis forced Chen to give up her artistic practice, most of her time now taken up either by assisting Cao, or doing paid translation work. When Beijing was colonised by the Japanese Chen and Cao fled to Chengdu. Life thus became tough and money for living expenses became the most important goal. Given the large number of unemployed men, Chen along with other professional women could not now find a job. Cao thus became the bread winner, employed as a middle school teacher. He nevertheless remained writing and translating for publishers because of his outstanding educational resume and academic reputation. Moreover, Chen’s poetry could not be published because poetry was not a favourable genre during the war. As a result, she was compelled to shift her focus to assisting Cao’s so-called ‘meaningful work’ as well as doing additional translation work. Chen thus became subsidiary to and dependent on her former mentor, and in the process lost her

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<sup>51</sup> See Chen Li’s “The Chronology of Chen Jingrong’s Life and Work” (727).

autonomy as a creative artist. As a consequence, her poetic career stagnated and competition between the two came to dominate their relationship

Chen's ambivalence towards Cao is expressed in her continuing gratitude to her first mentor and her anxiety that his influence cast shadows on her writing that suppressed poetic autonomy. In "The Philosopher and the Cat" ("Zheren yu Mao") written in the autumn of 1937, the beginning of their exile in Chengdu, she represents Cao as the beacon which once guided and cast light on her. However, the speaker loses her glamorous guide and asks desperately: "where is my light"? At the end of this poem, the light is replaced by the eyes of a mysterious cat visiting her at midnight, which is more like a self-projection. Chen continued to express her disappointment in the poem "Window" ("Chuang"). She moans: "Gone, you with / your light / illuminating thoroughly my shadow; / I alone get lost / in the endless dusk" (21-25). In a piece of her prose named "The Memory of April" ("Siyue zhi Yi"), she writes, without mentioning Cao's name, that once she listened to him with all her heart and soul and the love between them was like "the flame of a candle as gentle as the breeze in spring". In the end, this love "burned up her pride" (588). Chen's frustration and the pain of losing her freedom to be a poet is powerfully described in a prose work named "The Angel in Prison" ("Tianshi zhi Qiu"), written in the autumn of 1937. She symbolises the stagnation of her poetic career as the snapping of an angel's wings. She writes that the wing-broken angel cannot dance freely and sing a hymn to the sun. This picture of an imprisoned angel reflects her suffocating feelings when she became a poet who could not write: a poet, in other words, with aphasia. To follow a male mentor was no longer an opportunity for inspiration but it was a constraint upon her creative potential and autonomy.

The examination of the relationship between the two women poets and their male mentors thus reveals that the latter played a double role: one as the teacher and promoter who



initiated their poetic careers and the other as the poetic authority who threatened their emerging autonomy and freedom.

Mentors helped Chen and H.D. to build their early literary knowledge and taste and establish their public reputation as gifted poets. Escorted by Pound and Cao, the women successfully entered public sphere as independent poets with their own voices. When they escaped from home with poetic ambition fostered by mentoring, Pound and Cao who had already gained fame in their circle naturally played the role of agent and intermediary between the two young women and poetic society. Freed from their families, H.D. and Chen however, now had to deal with two roles in a new situation, namely women's relation to public life and women's relation to the realm of poetry. The first problem was how a woman might gain access to society as an independent subject without the intermediary of family. At that time, when women escaped from home they gave up the identity formulated for them within patriarchal family structure. They were exposed to the hostility of society which threatened to return them to a subordinate position again. This problem was everywhere compelling, reflected in the question raised by an influential Chinese intellectual Luxun: what will happen to Henrik Ibsen's Nora after she leaves home (165)?<sup>52</sup> Apart from the general hostility in society, a more serious problem emerged as soon as H.D. and Chen picked up a pen to write: the legitimation of women's poetry writing. That is to say, how could women access the realm of poetry when they remained on the outside of the poetic tradition? These compelling problems, however, were only ever partially addressed with the help of their mentors' literary prestige.

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<sup>52</sup> This is from Lunxun's critical reading of Henrik Ibsen's three-act play *A Doll's House* (1879). Lunxun raised this question by writing an essay "What Will Happen to Nora after She Leaves Home" ("Nana Zou hou Zenyang") (1923). His answer was that she either degenerated or returned home if the social and economic inequity between men and women still existed.

Simultaneously, the two women poets perceived that the traces of the mentors in their creative practice and their relative power and privilege in the realm of poetry negatively imposed on their own writing. The mentors' voices that came to be entwined in their poetry beset them sufficiently to initiate a second experience of aphasic anxiety. As authoritarian figures and as rivals, the mentors suppressed the free development of the protégée's individuality, attempting to cultivate them as disciples who would support their values and projects. Arguably, this can be seen as an attempt to subjugate their protégées to a secondary position in the realm of poetry. In this sense, gendered hostility and attempted regulation did not disappear, but in fact became stronger. In 1915, H.D. ended her poetic relationship with Pound after he had left Imagism for a new revolutionary campaign when she chose to help Amy Lowell publish another collection of Imagist poems. Chen broke with Cao in both poetic and personal relationships in 1939 and never contacted him again.

Marriage became the third crisis of poetic autonomy and freedom, because both Chen and H.D. were inevitably threatened with the possibility of being confined to the role of wife. This form of conflict was reflected in the tension between husband and wife who each competed for speaking rights in the family. Moreover, the problem was more complicated in H.D. and Chen's case because they were married to poets who took their masculine privilege for granted, not only in marriage, but also in poetic society.

Marriage threatened H.D.'s independence as a poet and it constrained her creativity. Although she attempted to establish a marriage of independence with the English poet Richard Aldington in October 1913, this appears to have been grounded on reciprocity rather than romance; Guest remarks that they were a "business-like couple" (34). H.D. provided Aldington with her talent and inspiration as the so-called "true Greek" and in turn Aldington offered his academic-based knowledge of classics to H.D. for her writing. This business-like marriage, however, did not guarantee her poetic or personal autonomy. She remained anxious

about her independent poetic achievement. Both early participators in Imagism, H.D. and her husband were usually referred to as the Aldingtons and the name H.D. was replaced by Mrs. Aldington on social occasions. These appellations have been well documented in the correspondence and memoirs of their contemporaries. Naturally, H.D. worried that all her creativity and effort in writing poetry would be subsumed under her husband's name. For H.D., the title "Mrs Aldington" indicated a subordinate relationship and therefore put her autonomy at risk. Guest mentions a letter from H.D. to Amy Lowell, the guardian and patron of post-Pound's Imagism, pointing out the former's anxiety at being addressed as Mrs. Aldington. Determined to keep her career separate from that of Aldington, she worried that their poetry might be confused by the public who saw them as a married couple (Guest 69). Moreover, the frustration and anxiety caused by her marriage disturbed her writing, because the experience disappointed her and devoured her energy and creativity. The stillbirth of her first baby and the consequent fear of future pregnancies disturbed her; Aldington's adultery in 1915 was troubling. Inevitably, these feelings had a severe negative impact on her writing. She confided her frustration and anxiety in her poetic practice to John Cournos in a letter and cried out that "I only want to write!" (Guest 79) Hence the marriage became an obstacle.

Similarly, Chen's marriage threatened her poetic freedom in three related aspects. The difficult and isolated domestic life in north-western Lanzhou in Gansu province drained her of poetic inspiration. In 1940, she had married a poet, Sha Lei. Shortly after their marriage the couple moved from the capital Chongqing to Lanzhou, Sha Lei's hometown. Lanzhou, far from more civilised cities, was short of modern facilities and lacked an active intellectual environment. Moreover, the harsh natural environment compounded the difficulties of daily life. Chen notes the harsh weather in Lanzhou in a prose work named "Street" ("Jie"). She writes that "The wind from the northwest is whistling, sands hurling up" (628). Moreover, Chen found the heavy work of a wife and mother of two girls exhausted her and took away

her time for writing. This situation became worse when her husband went to work in Qinghai, a place far from their home. In this way, the wife sacrificed her career for her family to support the career of the husband (ironically copying her mother's life, nearly ten years after she first ran away). The disillusion of romance in her marriage and the personal confinement experienced as a wife also threatened her autonomy and freedom. Chen metaphorically expresses her disappointment and anger at her marriage in a poem named "The Romance of a Knight" ("Qishi zhi Lian") written in 1944, which is a rewriting of the chivalric romance. In this poem, the poet accuses the Knight of being a liar who trapped a bird once flying freely in the sky in his own garden. This story alludes to her domestic situation, where she is confined at home with no freedom and in misery, numbed, silenced, and robbed of her inspiration to write.

The role of poet was engulfed by the role of wife and Chen creativity in poetry was withering. As she recalls, her life then was like a pond of still water with nothing left but sighs. Zhao Yiheng observes that writing became the "luxury fortuity" for her during that time. Zhao argues that these fortuitous pieces of writing cannot reach the height of her writing before the war; they are only "a pedestrian expression of her sorrow" (5). This experience of the anxiety of losing her poetic voice is described in a symbolic way in her prose collection, *The Starry Rain* (*Xing Yu Ji*) (1946). In the preface to this book, Chen claims that this experience is a dismal dream in the dismal north-western plateau (543). In an essay named "Thirsty (*Keyi*)", she elaborates this dream as a nightmare, in which she has lost her voice in the coils of a python. In this dream, Chen cries out: "where is my voice?" (586). In her sporadic poems, she describes this impasse with metaphors such as the action of "shutting [a] window" and that of "putting away her lyre". She writes with disappointment at the end of the poem "At Rest" ("Anxi"): "forever silence— / forever / at rest in the desperate desert" (18-20).

Marriage, as a result, became a threat to the poetic freedom of H.D. and Chen. Escape from it becomes simply another necessity in defending their freedom. H.D.'s relationship to Aldington became loose and their marriage began to fall apart in 1915, when her husband enlisted in the army. Aldington's departure for the army was a relief to H.D., as she was satisfied that she could live alone without him. Chen's escape from her marriage was more dramatic. In January of 1945, she secretly fled to Chongqing, travelling more than one thousand kilometres by herself, to restart her independent poetic career in the city that was China's cultural and political capital during the War of Resistance. From that time, her marriage was dissolved.

To defend their personal and poetic independence, the *three escapes* can be viewed as self-imposed exile. After the completion of the three escapes, these two women released their bodies from patriarchal institutions and gained both life and poetic freedom. By removing the gendered social and intellectual confinement, their hard-won personal and poetic autonomy prepared both poets for achieving their articulation of female-centred 'reality'. Chen explicitly describes the restraints of traditional authorities as "three paths leading to tombs" and takes her completion of the third escape as a release from these paths ("Thirsty" 587). The poetry of 'new beauty' is the fruit of such a project and as such it appears to have demanded a severance from all domestic ties. In 1916, H.D., leading an independent poetic and personal life again, published her first poetry collection *Sea Garden*, which presents the images representing 'new beauty'. In the middle of 1945, beginning to start a new life in Chongqing, Chen wrote a series of poems which embody the notion of 'new beauty'. The poetry of 'new beauty' thus becomes the trophy to record their freedom and autonomy and was also evidence of their autonomous existence.

In conclusion, the female-centred position of H.D. and Chen comes into being after they successfully freed themselves from the direct control of patriarchal authorities. It is only

once they had posited their freedom that they could begin to create for and by themselves. In other words, the completion of ‘three escapes’ ensured them an alternative life in which they could survive and autonomously respond to the external world.

The change of the relation of these two poets’ bodies to the external world is translated into their early poetry by the transformation of the borderline images which represent their bodily situations. I now turn to examine the images of ‘new beauty’ and reveal how the poetry of ‘new beauty’ reflects a female-centred ‘reality’ and thus a poetic evolution that hinges on the shift of their point of view, from a male-centred perspective to a female-centred one.

## Chapter Three: The Birth of a New Voice: Estrangement and the Formation of a Female-Centred Discourse of Beauty

The previous chapter contours the gendered situations of H.D. and Chen and provides a context for their poetry of 'new beauty'. In this chapter, I place the poetry of 'new beauty' in this context and examine its images in two ways. This chapter follows one thread that the female body of the two poets enters language by the poets' creation of images of 'new beauty' through poetic estrangement, which forms a female subject position in the poetry of 'new beauty'. I contend that a female-centred discourse is constructed by examining the signifying process of the concept of 'new beauty'. To illustrate this construction, I take a formalist examination of the poetry in question in both diachronic and synchronic ways within H.D.'s *Sea Garden* and Chen's *Overflow* and conceptualise the concept of 'new beauty'. I then reveal that the creation of this concept is based on a new relationship between a female body and its external world. I argue that the poetry of 'new beauty' is a unique mode of discourse, articulating the subjective and gendered experience of these two women poets.

### 3.1 Empowering the Weak: poetic estrangement and the formation of the concept of 'new beauty'

I examine the images of 'new beauty' in H.D. and Chen's poetry by a diachronic and synchronic reading of their first poetry collections: respectively *Sea Garden* (1916) and *Overflow* (1948). My primary goal of this reading is to show that both poets conceive a notion of 'new beauty' by creating a range of powerful natural images estranged from

accustomed imagery of weakness. The conception of ‘new beauty’ represents an unusual, and harsh aesthetics.

### **3.1.1 Flowers between Land and Sea: the images of H.D.’s ‘New Beauty’ in *Sea Garden***

*Sea Garden* presents six delicately organised poems on flowers and gardens to formulate similar images of a radically ‘new beauty’, which form a pattern to collectively construct the central image of a sea garden in this volume. Five of the poems make up the cluster which I term as the *sea-flower quintet* in this thesis, sharing a similar theme and structure and depicting pictures of small flowers and plants living by the sea: “Sea Rose”, “Sea Lily”, “Sea Poppies”, “Sea Violet”, and “Sea Iris”. Apart from the sea-flower quintet, “Sheltered Garden” presents a panoramic view of a garden. I configure this pattern by reading these poems as a whole and by comparing the garden imagery appearing here with that in the poems written at the very beginning of H.D.’s poetic career. My argument is that this pattern forms a harsh aesthetic which fleshes out what the poet herself called “new beauty” in “Sheltered Garden”.

The specific structure of these six poems manifests this ‘new beauty’ by the intensive recurring image of a wild and rough garden located in the liminal space between land and sea that is estranged from its conventional equivalent characterised by a profusion of delicate flowers. The notion of the garden as a sophisticated, designed domain bearing delicate flowers and plants is a place embracing conventionalised beauty. In other words, the word “garden” in a poem could be expected to evoke pleasing scenery which is symmetrical, cultivated and full of pleasant shapes, colours, and smells. Moreover, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes, garden is a piece of ground adjoining houses. However, the sea garden



constructed in these six poems opposes the accustomed imagination, being instead a garden of wildness that is, both deformed and harsh.

The sea-flower quintet provides pictures of a wild sea garden with harsh characteristics from its location at the borderline between land and sea. As in each poem of the sea-flower quintet, the sea rose and sea iris have roots in the sand; the reed in “Sea Lily” lies on temple-steps; the sea poppy grows in pebbles; and the sea violet stands on the sand-bank. Every flower or plant in the quintet is apparently insubstantially rooted and drifting in the waves.

The sea garden is located in a space of desolation and loneliness suggested by the notion of the borderline space. The flowers and plants in H.D.’s sea garden, although assorted like other gardens, appear insignificant and isolated from other flowers and plants, in contrast to the flowers designed in lush groups in a cultivated garden. In other words, the plants featured in the sea-flower quintet are solitary with literally only one flower or plant presented in each poem. For example, the rose in “Sea Rose” is the only living thing in the picture. The sea violet growing against the wind is also the only one of its kind by the sea. The so-called “sea lily”, as the title suggests, is not a real lily with a fragrant cup but a wild reed with a sturdy stem. The sea iris stands on its own against a host of sea weeds. Although the title “Sea Poppies” is in the plural, only one poppy is represented. Moreover, the smallness and loneliness of the flower is foregrounded by its almost empty background. Standing on the edge of the sea, the poppy takes up a position against it, creating a stark contrast between a single small plant and the seemingly boundary-less sea. The latter’s vastness thus deepens the impression of the smallness, loneliness and vulnerability of the plant.

The sea garden is shaped by nature rather than cultivated by a human gardener, because it is situated in a hostile environment and possessing an unstable and barren habitat.

Specifically, the “sea rose” is “caught in the drift” (“Sea Rose”), and the stalk of the poppy “has caught root among pebbles” (“Sea Poppies”). Similarly, the root of the weed in “Sea Iris” is “tangled in sand” and the grasp of sea violet is “frail / on the edge of the sand-hill” (“Sea Violet” 14-15). In this unstable environment, the sea garden is exposed to the violence of nature; the flowers and plants threatened and finally, tortured by the wind and waves. For example, in “Sea Rose”, the wind hits the ground, whirling up the sands. In “Sea Lily”, the wind slashes at the back of the reed and shatters it, “hissing to cover it with froth”. Similarly, the sea poppy drifts “flung by the sea / and grated shells / and split conch-shells” (“Sea Poppies” 10-12), the sea violet “lies fronting all the wind / among the torn shells / on the sand-bank” (“Sea Violet”), and the “sea iris” roots in sands are washed by waves (“Sea Iris”). These portraits patently demonstrate the adverse living conditions of the sea garden. A blast of wind or an attack by waves may take the “sea flowers” at any moment. In fact, flowers and plants here are somehow defective due to the constant attacks of wind and sea. They are weak, stunted, and some are even broken. “Sea Rose”, the opening poem of *Sea Garden*, presents a rose not lush and immaculate but “marred”. It is a “meagre flower, thin, / sparse of leaf” (3-4). The reed in “Sea Lily” is “slashed and torn”. The ripe poppy capsule in “Sea Poppies” is broken and its inner fluid is “spilled near the shrub-pines / to bleach on the boulders” (6-7). The white violet in “Sea Violet” is “fragile” and in “Sea Iris” the sea iris is a “brittle flower” and “one petal like a shell / is broken” (4-5). These depictions suggest that unchecked natural elements powerfully structure the formation of the sea garden.

The contour of the sea garden suggests a garden estranged from gardens that are painstakingly cared-for and possessed by human beings. In contrast, the sea-flower quintet creates an image of wild but vulnerable plants growing naturally, free from regulation and control. This estrangement invites an inevitable comparison between two types of gardens and flowers yet simultaneously implies that the unusual sea-garden has an alternative intrinsic

beauty. The meagre rose presented in “Sea Rose,” for instance, is “more precious/than a wet rose/single on a stem—” (5-7). The phrase “more precious” indicates a patent comparison between the sea rose and its conventionalised counterpart. In “Sea Lily”, the reed in the wind is “doubly rich”. In another poem, the brittle “sea iris” with a broken petal is similarly described as a “fortunate one”, for it is both scented and stinging. The words “double” and “fortunate” again imply comparisons. All of these adjectives-“precious”, “rich,” “fortunate”- suggest a strongly positive experience, because they invoke a pleasant feeling. Moreover, the poet uses “beautiful” in a straightforward manner to describe this broken poppy that has only one leaf on its stem, so the solitary leaf is compared with leaves in a meadow. In addition, the repetition of “but” in “Sea Violet” is not a breach of economy, rather it indicates that the white violet rooted in the shifting sands by the sea is preferable to the proudly fluttering “greater blue violets” on the hill:

but who would change for these  
who would change for these  
one root of the white sort? (10-12)

She continues in the next stanza:

Violet  
your grasp is frail  
on the edge of the sand-hill,  
but you catch the light—  
frost, a star edges with its fire. (13-17)

Here the white violet is more striking, because it has a chance to become bright by catching the light despite its dangerous location. These two stanzas, serving as strong expressions of feeling, indicate that the white violet is more precious, and therefore more beautiful, than the blue one. All of these comparisons, in fact, suggest that this wild garden with defective flowers and plants is not a symbol of a Eliotian “waste land” but a representation of beauty.

Unlike the sea-flower quintet, however, “Sheltered Garden” demonstrates the estrangement in creating the sea garden by juxtaposing two contrasting scenes of a garden (before and after wind-strike). The former represents the conventional garden and the latter the sea garden.

“Sheltered Garden” initially presents a panoramic view of an artificially beautiful garden, well-protected and which in turn preserves *expected beauty* (conventionalised beauty) in shape, colour and taste. Located on a little hill, this place is tightly bordered by pinks, colourful in sight and sweet in smell. Furthermore, all the fruits here are meticulously wrapped with cloth or straw, but this carefully tended beauty is deemed a beauty without strength which chokes out other forms of life. This sheltered garden is lifeless, for it is unchanging and inactive. The routes in this garden are rigidly laid out as all the foot-paths lead to the same place and people can only see the same view along these paths. The speaker of the poem feels disappointed, for only one view, one perspective may be seen:

Every way ends, every road,  
  
every foot-path leads at last  
  
to the hill-crest—  
  
then you retrace your steps,  
  
or find the same slope on the other side,

precipitate. (3-8)

The stanza above presents a tedious life in the sheltered garden: the sequential and recurrent use of “every”, “retrace,” and “the same” implies regularity and immutability. In addition, the air in this garden is permeated with only one kind of scent from the colourful pinks and is stuffy in spite of being pleasant. Likewise, the fruits wrapped in cloth or straw may look wonderful in both shape and colour, but they grow in darkness. The pink-made fences and the wadding by cloth and straw ward off risks and dangers but also prevent changes. For the well-protected plants and fruits, this also keeps them from living a robust life on their own. The protection is set up for the flowers and fruits in the garden not because they ask for it, but because an external power (presumably the owner of the garden) desires it. Thus, the speaker asks: “Have you seen fruit under cover / that wanted light—” (18-19). Protection results in an unsatisfying form of beauty by keeping the strength of raw, unmediated life away from the garden.

The poet, therefore, provides a potential solution to this problem: exposing the garden to the attack of nature:

I want wind to break,  
  
scatter these pink-stalks,  
  
snap off their spiced heads,  
  
fling them about with dead leaves—  
  
spread the paths with twigs,  
  
limbs broken off,  
  
trail great pine branches,

hurled from some far wood  
  
right across the melon-patch,  
  
break pear and quince—  
  
leave half-trees, torn, twisted  
  
but showing the fight was valiant. (43-54)

After the violent transformation caused by wind, the final stanza of “Sheltered Garden” presents the conception of “new beauty”, a representation that is a new idea of beauty:

O to blot out this garden  
  
to forget, to find a new beauty  
  
in some terrible  
  
wind-tortured place. (55-58)

These violent changes thus bring the features of ‘new beauty’ to light, where it becomes the aftermath of a natural destruction embodied in an alien garden with broken plants.

The preceding reading of the six poems suggests that they have textual correlations because they all revolve around the theme of what H.D. proposes as “new beauty” in “Sheltered Garden”. The five sea-flower poems, on the one hand, respectively represent the sea garden from different perspectives, such as the defective appearance of flowers or their bitter-sweet smell, flower by flower. On the other hand, “Sheltered Garden” reiterates those features comparatively against a conventional norm and concludes that they function as a form which can be called “new beauty”.

There are some examples. The speaker in “Sheltered Garden” calls for a garden that would mix the aromatic with the astringent scent from the “sharp swish of a branch”. H.D.

uses the recurring sign of negation to emphasise a strong and earthy smell: “there is no scent of resin / in this place, / no taste of bark, of coarse weeds” (13-15). Meanwhile, such a complex aroma from the plants in response to a strong wind corresponds to the “acrid fragrance” from a wind-tortured rose in “Sea Rose” and the “scent and stinging” smell of an iris with a broken petal by the wind in “Sea Iris”. The speaker also envisions the exposure of the fruits in the garden to violent nature. The poet uses the word “let” twice: “let them cling, ripen of themselves” (28) and “let it bleach yellow / in the winter light” (34-35). This double invocation of permission indicates that the fruits should be freely, naturally, exposed to the cold and frost. Only if they confront the bad winter on their own will they gain their true appearance which is “fair with a russet coat” and “yellow”. Similarly, the fruits exposed in the winter weather gain their true taste from the frost, a taste which is both bitter and tart. However, this experience in a harsh situation never dilutes the quality that the fruits have for the poetic voice. On the contrary, they have beauty both in appearance and in taste; the russet or yellow colour is “fair”, and the taste of frost is “exquisite”. In this respect, such colour and taste conceived in “Sheltered Garden” echo the “double rich” and “precious” nature of flowers in the heavy wind of the quintet. Furthermore, the speaker summons a wind to shatter the sheltered garden. In the stanza presenting the wind-attacked cultivated space, the verbs used here resonate with the violent actions appearing elsewhere in the quintet: “break”, “scatter”, “snap”, and “fling”. The verbs that occur frequently in “Sheltered Garden” when compared with their discrete usage in the quintet, highlight the violence caused by the wind and increase the intensity. Although only “half trees, torn, twisted” are left after the attack, this garden, however, remains beautiful.

The recurrence and correspondence that shuttle back and forth between these six poems link what H.D. calls “new beauty” in “Sheltered Garden” to the sea-flower quintet. In addition, the five poems also introduce the natural environment in which these flowers and

plants live—the seaside with its inevitable prevailing winds. Thus, the sea garden is presented exhaustively and in minute detail from every imaginable angle. It is, however, in the “Sheltered Garden” that, like a worm in the rose, the features are subsumed under the conception of “new beauty” that presents, without apology, a wind-violated garden which exactly echoes the sea garden depicted in the quintet by the pervading hybrid smell and examples of broken flowers and plants. The six poems thus are most likely to be strategically compiled together as a whole. In this sense, the final stanza of “Sheltered Garden” proposing the notion of ‘new beauty’ functions as the conclusion not only to “Sheltered Garden” but also the quintet. At this point, the six poems, distinct but textually correlated to each other, exemplify the estrangement in the sea garden. In this sense, I see the estranged sea garden as the core image of what H.D. calls “new beauty”. It is from this “new beauty” that I have coined ‘new beauty’ as a concept to contrast this new aesthetic with conventionalised beauty. All these features which form the so-called “new beauty” is the characteristics of what I term ‘new beauty’ in H.D.’s poetry.

Furthermore, this correlation corresponds to Susan Friedman’s observation that “Sheltered Garden” is the touchstone of *Sea Garden* (“Exile in the American Grain” 40). Friedman’s evaluation implies that positing the notion of ‘new beauty’ represented by an estranged sea garden is the central justification for publishing *Sea Garden*. As a collection of poems, the former is intentionally organised around a theme because it encompasses only a portion of the poems written by H.D. from 1912 to 1916. Some of the other works written during the same period are collected in the subsequent volume published the following year, *The God* (1917). Other critics’ studies also conclude that the arrangement of the poems in *Sea Garden* is clearly intentional. When Diana Collecott discusses the narrative elements in H.D.’s lyric poems, she remarks that “*Sea Garden* is a far from random collection of poems” (144). More specifically, Friedman notes that the five sea-flower poems assume important



roles in structuring *Sea Garden* as a whole, observing that the sea-flower poems are strategically scattered to give the book coherence (*Penelope's Web* 56).

The intentional selection and arrangement of *Sea Garden* as well as providing the title of the collection create the sense of an estranged sea garden in the notion of 'new beauty'. Functionally, the six poems in question form an organic structure to present the notion of 'new beauty' as each poem plays a distinct role. The quintet depicts a picture of a rough sea garden from five separate views. Each individual poem introduces a close-up of a plant living by the sea. Unlike the parallel delineation of the sea garden from various perspectives in the quintet, "Sheltered Garden", as a "microcosmic version" of a garden according to Friedman (*Penelope's Web* 56), integrates the features of H.D.'s "new beauty" delineated separately by the quintet and presents them in one poem. The five sea-flower poems objectively portray pictures of 'new beauty' in a distant way, while "Sheltered Garden" operates as a declaration of the advent of 'new beauty' by introducing a speaker "I". Moreover, when the speaker of "Sheltered Garden" searches for a "wind-tortured place" to find "new beauty", the quintet depicts such places in detail.

*Sea Garden*, in this sense, assumes a productive and constructive role patterning the estranged imagery of 'new beauty'. The textual and structural correlation between the sea-flower quintet and "Sheltered Garden" enhances the recurrence of the imagery of the estranged sea garden—the scene with tortured flowers and plants in the wind, each poem treated the theme similarly but with slight differences. By this means, a concept of 'new beauty' comes into being. In other words, the alienating sea garden is not a single poetic image but serves to establish an abstract idea. when the whole collection is read at a sitting, the correlated six poems scattered in *Sea Garden* may repeatedly remind the reader of the individual images of the "wind-tortured" garden in one way or another and of the relation of these images to the general term 'new beauty'. In this way, the impression of the wildness of

the sea garden and the harshness of the flowers and plants are reinforced and lead to the abstraction of the notion of ‘new beauty’: a harsh aesthetic manifested by the strength and hardness of flowers and plants produced from dynamic confrontations with violence.

The encounter does not create a hierarchically unilateral relationship between batterers and victims, but establishes an equally interactive relationship between violent force and the flowers and plants. In other words, this encounter does not make the wind, waves, and sand batterers but manifests the independence and autonomy of the flowers and plants in the sea garden as they confront a natural, even, an inevitable violence. In this sense, the encounter between the two parties in question manifests a dialogue between two conflicting strands of strength: the external force of nature and the inner vitality of the flowers and plants. The trope in “Sea Lily” aptly describes the encounter where sand in the wind cutting the petals is equated with a piece of flint striking on stone. When the wind shatters these flowers and plants, the latter respond rather than submitting. The encounter is not a device to pit the strong against the weak because it produces neither a winner nor a loser because an equal position is accorded to each party. As dialectic, one opposes and confronts the other. As a result, their beauty comes out of the interaction between the two strands of strength, or of equal weight, since they are confronting those forces which compose their natural environment rather than submitting to arbitrary, external violence.

Some critics observe this dynamic process and a new thing produced during it. for example, Eileen Gregory notices that the dynamic of this confrontation embodied in violent actions may result in something new for the flowers. She takes this encounter as a metaphor for an alchemical process in which the former is forged by violent action. Gregory, however, shifts her initially promising focus from explaining this *something new* to examining the alchemical process: how the action of “crystallising” and “salting” is embodied in H.D.’s poems (86-90). I contend that the something new lies not in alchemy as such but in a natural,

uncontrived response to external forces. The dynamic in this confrontation attests to the inner strength and hardness of the flowers and plants with no need for a mysterious alchemical process that transmutes base material to gold. In other words, the poet aims neither to condemn this external violence nor to show her moral sympathy for the victims.

What the new product that the poet celebrates instead is a harsh aesthetic manifested by the inner strength and hardness embodied in the bitter-sweet smell, luminous but austere images, survival in a harsh environment, and the dramatic effects of confrontation. These are the attributes praised in the six poems in question. The smell of the flowers, for instance, is a complex and apparently contradictory mixture, described as the “acrid fragrance” in “Sea Rose”, “aromatic, astringent” smell in “Sheltered Garden”, and “sweet and salt” in “Sea Iris”. Diana Collecott observes that the poetic use of a composite of mixed smells is derived from Sappho’s creation of the oxymoronic phrase bitter-sweet, which suggests that adding bitterness to sweetness makes the aroma more tempting and complex, as with Sappho’s understanding of love (“H.D.’s Transformative Poetics” 95). Abundance produced by a strong and multi-layered sensation generates a pleasing and satisfying feeling. Thus, this feeling in abundance that is caused by strength rather than torpidity manifests the beauty that the poet pursues. Moreover, the ‘new beauty’ calls for light. The trope of flint and stone in “Sea Lily” implies the light cast upon the reed. In “Sea Violet”, the white violet by the sea is preferable to the blue one on the top of a hill, since it can “catch the light— / frost, a star edges with its fire” (16-17). In “Sheltered Garden”, the speaker cries out “Have you seen fruit under cover / that wanted light—”. These quotations suggest that the intensity of brightness unmediated is significant. The brightness of the exposed flowers and plants is luxurious, despite the danger which they may encounter. Brightness, a quality of the poet’s ‘new beauty’, is a testament to the existence of inner strength. Thus, the poet foregrounds the beauty in brightness by relinquishing sequestered safety. Moreover, the ‘new beauty’ comes

out of not just any place but a rough and unfriendly environment, a “wind-tortured place” (Sheltered Garden). These growing things do not lead easy and comfortable lives the recurring word “catch” vividly describing the dangers of this environment thereby foregrounding the unorthodox setting of the ‘new beauty’. For example, the stanza in “Sea Rose” which states that “you are caught in the drift” suggests that the beauty in this stunted rose by the sea lies in the struggle of the rose against the elements. Thus, the harshness is also a touchstone of inner strength in as much as it represents the poet’s harsh new aesthetic. Overall, these three attributes manifest the quality of endurance and hardness from within, thus manifesting the independence and autonomy of the flowers and plants and revealing H.D.’s ‘new beauty’ in the process.

The comparison of the imagery of garden and flowers between its usage in H.D.’s earliest poetry and the poetry of ‘new beauty’ suggests that the ‘new beauty’ is a new-constructed concept. To demonstrate this comparison, I take the poem “Orchard” (originally titled as “Priapus”) and “Acon” as two examples. In “Orchard”, one of her first published imagist poems written in 1912, beauty for the poet is represented by delicate pear flowers and their fruits. In this poem, the orchard is a domesticated place and the imagery of flowers and fruits is in their conventionalised usage. The orchard is well-tended and controlled by not mortals but a more powerful god:

I saw the first pear

as it fell—

the honey-seeking, golden-banded,

the yellow swarm

was not more fleet than I,

(spare us from loveliness)

and I fell prostrate

crying:

you have flayed us

with your blossoms,

spare us the beauty

of fruit-trees. (1-12)

Later, the speaker of the poem entreats the god:

I bring you an offering—

do you, alone unbeautiful,

son of the god,

spare us from loveliness:

these fallen hazel-nuts,

stripped late of their green sheaths,

grapes, red-purple,

their berries

dripping with wine,

pomegranates already broken,

and shrunken figs

and quinces untouched,

I bring you as offering. (19-31)

The poet presents an orchard with abundant products which is astonishing and also tempting. Unlike the “Sheltered Garden”, the images of lovely flowers and ripe fruits in this poem, pleasing and attractive, represent a delicate beauty accompanied by what seems to be a compelling form of temptation. The speaker of this poem uses the word “spare” twice to show her cautiousness, the resistance to the temptation. The correspondence between the two sentences with the word “spare” shows that in this poem beauty means loveliness in a conventionalised manner. Moreover, the flowers and fruits are also passive because they are simply treated as offerings. Similarly, the flowers, such as irises and poppies, are taken as offerings in “Acon”:

bring offerings,

Illyrian iris,

and a branch of shrub,

and frail-headed poppies. (33-36)

The above examples reveal that there is a significant change in treating the imagery of gardens and flowers in H.D.’s early poetry, from an ordinarily accustomed use to a later, distorted one. This change foregrounds the forms of poetic estrangement which is manifested through the sea-garden images and the notion of ‘new beauty’ as a harsh aesthetic presented by the six poems in question.

### **3.1.2 The Shivering Non-Flowering Branch: images of ‘new beauty’ in Chen Jingrong’s**

#### ***Overflow***

Chen Jingrong, like H.D. in *Sea Garden*, formulates a notion of ‘new beauty’ through patterning imagery around the action of shivering in *Overflow* which includes the poems written during 1935 to 1945. A contextual reading of *Overflow* in both diachronic and synchronic ways reveals that the ‘new beauty’ in Chen’s poetry is manifested by the strategic estrangement of the word “shiver” as an act caused by confrontation.

In the poem “The Non-Flowering Branch” (“Bu Kaihua de Shuzhi”) written in May of 1945, Chen uses an image of the shivering non-flowering branch to demonstrate a harsh aesthetic which represents the notion of ‘new beauty’, which is opposite to the conventionalised symbol of beauty. Chen presents the comparison of the two different types of beauty by an ironic beauty contest between the shivering non-flowering branch and flowers in “The Non-Flowering Branch”. It is the first and only image that directly represents her conception of ‘new beauty’ in *Overflow*.

The comparison implies a contrast between the old and the new. Chen writes: “The non-flowering branch / has a more beautiful shiver than flowers” (13-14). The comparative form of beautiful suggests that the opposition of the shivering branch and flowers is established in this poem through the contrast between more and less. The phrase “more beautiful” suggests that both images in question are beautiful but different: the beautiful embodied in flowers, and that embodied in a branch without flowers. The flower, on the one hand, as a traditional symbol of beauty, manifests the existing understanding of beauty. The image of the shivering non-flowering branch on the other is new, insofar as this image introduces an understanding of beauty drawn against the conventionalised one. Flowers for display are beautiful, but the beauty in the branch without flowers surpasses the beauty of the former. The contrast between flowers and the non-flowering branch is underpinned by the opposition between spring and autumn in the first stanza of “The Non-Flowering Branch”.

Chen constructs the opposition with a trope, equating the contrast between spring and autumn with the feeling of receiving a letter from a friend in a lonely life:

Like in the leaf-falling late autumn,  
  
suddenly recalling in spring  
  
the bright sunshine,  
  
tender rain. (1-4)

As the first stanza depicts, autumn is characterised by falling leaves while spring manifests bright sunshine and tender rain. The former is negative and the latter positive, suggested by the opposition of decline and prosperity underlying the autumn and spring images respectively. The impression of these two seasons as an overture, implies the contrast between the presence and absence of flowers. In other words, the beauty embodied in flowers is as soft and attractive as spring, while the beauty embodied in the shivering non-flowering branch is as isolated and harsh as late autumn.

The non-flowering branch as the new look beauty is defective and isolated. This branch is unproductive insofar as it lacks flowers. The image of “a silent branch” created in another poem named “Prairie Fire” (“Yehuo”), written only twelve days earlier, echoes the isolation and silence implied by the image of a branch in Chen’s poetry at that time. Chen writes: “I am a ripe fruit / Just falling from a silent branch; / But the garden will grow lusher—” (22-24). The quotation suggests that the branch bears no fruit and becomes “silent” because the fruit is gone. Another point to note is that this branch of beauty is situated in the bleak autumn, a transitional season between summer and winter symbolising a trend towards stabilisation and silence. The branch is also isolated from specific surroundings. The poet presents the image of the branch in a concise way: its location is both vague and solitary.



By the formulation of the contest between the old and new beauty, the poet puts the accustomed symbol of beauty on one end of the scale and the act of shivering on the other. Therefore, the ‘new beauty’ is represented by the branch’s *act of shivering*. This formulation thus give rise to a question: why make the uncomfortable act caused by cold and (or) fear the source invoking the feeling of beauty? This question inevitably calls for a reconsideration of the act of shivering in this poem. A contextual reading within the “The Non-Flowering Branch” and other correlated poems reveals a pattern of a powerful and autonomous act, which has been estranged from the ordinary lexical usage of shiver. I apply Roman Jakobson’s theory of contextual meaning and poetic language and Cleanth Brooks’s structuralist criticism, which are discussed in Chapter One to show the transformation of the meaning of the act of shivering.

The intensive and cumulative recurrence of the word shiver, creates a poetic pattern that reifies Chen’s ‘new beauty’. a survey of Chen’s poems collected in *Overflow* shows that an act of shivering not only appears in “The Non-Flowering Branch” but is repeatedly used distinctively in other nine poems in the third volume of *Overflow*, “Looking out at Tomorrow” (“Xiang Mingtian Liaowang”), which are written in the same period.

*Overflow* consists of three volumes compiled in chronological order reflecting different stages of Chen’s poetry: “The Philosopher and the Cat” (Zheren Yu Mao), “Crossing the Night” (Heng Guo Ye), and “Looking out at Tomorrow”. The chronological order of this collection reveals that the peak of poetic creation during the first ten-years of her career is the third stage, manifested by the productive writing of “Looking out at Tomorrow”. The poems in the first and second volumes are written over a period of four or five years, covering respectively from 1935 to 1939 and 1940 to April 1945. The first volume contains 11 poems and the second 34. Chen, however, produces 26 poems within only six months in

the third volume, from late April to October 1945.<sup>53</sup> This volume of work not only reveals the outburst of creativity during that time, but also reveals the ambition to construct a formal poetic patterning for the notion of ‘new beauty’.

This pattern is formed by the recurrence of the word shiver in the third volume, where 10 poems out of 26 contain the words describing its movement. The completion date at the end of each poem suggests that this recurrence covers the most productive process of writing from 28<sup>th</sup> April to 6<sup>th</sup> August. Three words are used to denote the movement of shiver in these poems: the compound word “*zhanli*” (such as in “The Non-Flowering Branch”), the polyphonic word “*zhan*”/ “*chan*” (such as in “The Edge outside the Edge” (“Bianyuan wai de Bianyuan”)) and its derivative— “*chandou*” (such as in “The Early Morning Stroll” (“Qingchen Manbu”)).

Although they are morphologically different,<sup>54</sup> these three words have the same lexical meaning in modern Chinese. *Zhanli*, as a derivative of *zhan*, is comprised of two independent words— “shake (*zhan*)” and “chestnut (*li*)”. It literally means common people are shaking caused by awe when they see the tablet made of chestnut trees which represents the God or the ancestors of the royal family who are worshipped in the temple. The usage of *zhanli* (originally carrying the meaning of *zhan* and *li*) can be dated back as early as the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC) in *The Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu*), describing the trembling of ordinary people in front of a chestnut tree in a temple<sup>55</sup>. With the development of the Chinese language, the usage of *zhanli* has become a compound word and

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<sup>53</sup> Most of the poems in this volume are written between April and June. Only two of the twenty-six poems are written in August and October respectively.

<sup>54</sup> The Chinese characters for “*zhanli*” is written as 战栗, “*zhan*”/ “*chan*” 颤 and “*chandou*” 颤抖.

<sup>55</sup> The original text is from Chapter 21 of Book III. In this chapter, it notes that Duke Ai asked Tsai Yu about the Holy Ground. Tsai Yu replied that the Hsia sovereigns marked theirs with a pine, the men of *Yin* used a cypress, the men of Chou used a chestnut-tree and he says that this (the chestnut tree) will cause ordinary people to be in fear and trembling. When instructively explaining this quotation, Arthur Waley, the translator and annotator of *The Analects of Confucius*, says the word “*li*” in this sentence is a pun, referring to both a chestnut-tree and “to be in awe” (99).

its meaning has been further expanded. This word referring to shaking caused by a general feeling of fear dates back to *Intrigues of the Warring States (Zhanguo Ce)*, a collection of stories, speeches, and historical records from the Warring States period (403-221 BC) compiled by a scholar named Liu Xiang (77-6 BC). In modern Chinese, the word *zhanli* is used in a broader way, referring to an uncontrollable if slight shaking caused by being frightened, cold, or excited. In modern usage, the meaning of this word is thus mainly based on the root word *zhan*, because the meaning of chestnut has faded away in the process of the evolution of the Chinese language. Originally, the word *zhan/chan* denoted shaking of the head. With its development, shaking here does not exclusively refer to the head. One of the earliest sources of this usage of *zhan/chan* as shivering is from *Huainanzi* (sometime before 139 BC), a collection of essays from a series of scholarly debates held at the court of Liu An, the King of Huainan. In this Book, it is noted that one shivers when he/she suffers cold as well as fear. In modern Chinese, this compound word generally denotes the shaking caused by chill or fear, where *chandou*, as a derivative of *zhan/chan*, is comprised of the root word *chan* and *dou*, another word echoing the movement of shaking.

This brief etymological survey of the three words *zhanli*, *zhan/chan*, and *chandou* in Chinese indicates that they share the same meaning as shivering. In other words, the meaning of slightly shaking caused by coldness or fear is registered by three different but related characters. Accordingly, these three words are a group of *variant characters*. In “The Research Overview of Variant Chinese Characters” (2015), Su Wenying states that the variant Chinese characters include a group of different character forms (normally with the same or similar pronunciation) registering the same word. Lexically, *zhan* and *zhan/chan*, as two independent words or as the root words separately in *zhanli* and *chandou*, form a pair of *variant characters*, where *zhan* refers to an uncontrollable frightened shake. Moreover, the poetic context verifies the same usage of the three words. Contextually all the words refer to

the shaking performed by small and weak plants in a cold environment, such as the branch in cold autumn in “The Non-Flowering Branch” and the leaves in the early morning in “The Early Morning Stroll”. Thus, the three words are used in these poems for their lexical meaning: a passive reaction to a superior power implying the weak being overwhelmed. In this thesis despite the morphological differences of the Chinese characters, I have conflated all three words in the term, *shiver*, their English equivalent, because it makes no material difference to the argument.

The strategic recurrence of shiver reveals the primary function of the act of involuntary movement in this volume: joining the ten poems as a whole to build up a poetic pattern of parallel structures to conceptualise a ‘new beauty’. In terms of Jakobson’s theory of poetic language, the cumulative meaning built up around the act of shivering is the contextual meaning which is created by association based on other juxtaposed images.

“The Non-Flowering Branch” consists of two parts evident in both poetic form and content. The first three stanzas of this poem constitute the first part and the fourth and fifth stanzas form the second. Structurally, there is a clear break between the first three stanzas and the remaining two. The poem focuses on a narrative and self-expression in the first part, which depicts the speaker of the poem receiving a letter from an old friend and the speaker’s response to it. This section, mapping out the changes and contradiction of her feelings, thereby develops based on narrative logic, following psychological time. This narrative is breached by separately juxtaposed images in the fourth and fifth stanzas, where logical coherence is replaced by arbitrary juxtaposition. In the second part, images of the non-flowering branch, with flowers, the red leaves and a burning flame are put in parallel. The image of the non-flowering branch and flowers is presented as a statement; the image of red leaves is presented as a monologue; the image of the burning flame, is presented as an implicit dialogue. In this way, the linear development of the poem is interrupted and

suspended by repetition. The narrative thus gives way to the recurrence of images in producing meaning. In this sense, the former three stanzas are combined through the contiguity of logic while the latter two are combined by the metaphorical relation based on similarity, the effect achieved by parallelism. Parallelism thus builds up the *association* between words in equivalent positions and appropriates similar meanings to them.

In the first part, the parallel structure is constructed by the orderly distribution of words which are divided into two categories in opposition, respectively implying the status of *existence* and *non-existence*. Chen places three pairs of oppositions individually in each stanza as a deliberate structural device. They are “spring” and “autumn”, “always” and “seldom” and “perplexity” and “hope”. Weight is assigned to the third pair. Perplexity suggests a state of being lost, which means the direction to a future does not exist; hope, in contrast, shows a positive outlook towards the future. Thus, the opposition of perplexity and hope imply a hesitation before making a choice and this echoes the interruption of the narrative. The division of these two categories hints at the contrast between the presence and absence of flowers in the so-called beauty contest in the second part of the poem.

The second part of the poem presents the comparison between the non-flowering branch and the flower by the equivalent structure of sentences. *Equivalence relation* (by which poetic language functions) in the fourth stanza is suggested by the semicolon between the two sentences. The poet writes:

The non-flowering branch

has a more beautiful shiver than flowers;

oh of autumn, I love only

15

the red leaves in your sighing wind. (13-16)

Similarly, the fifth stanza is formed by two interrogative sentences in similar structures which create a dialogue with an imaginary “you” (the second person audience). The poet writes:

If all my passion turned into ashes—

Can you tell me, what I would be?

Thinking of it, I am the flame, and

How many times should I be burnt, towards death? (17-20)

By the parallelism of the two stanzas in the quotation provided above, the three images distributed in corresponding positions are juxtaposed in equivalence relations based on similarity. As a consequence, they share an associative meaning in Jakobson’s sense of the term. Moreover, these three images have connotative similarity in that they all express the poet’s positive attitude towards them. The poet praises the shiver of the non-flowering branch by using the comparative adjective “more beautiful”. She uses the phrase “only love” to emphasise her partiality to the red leaves in the wind. The self-identification with flame shows her advocacy of burning fire. In these ways, the associative meaning is enhanced based on yet another form of similarity.

Based on the logic of equivalence in similarity, the image of shivering thus gains its contextual meaning by making an analogy with the images of falling leaves and the burning flame. Michelle Yeh takes this type of parallel structure as *making analogy* and contends that *making analogy* is one of the distinct characteristics of modern Chinese poetry compared with traditional Chinese poetry (62-83). According to Yeh’s observation, Chen’s parallel structure may be one example of such style. Yeh points out that the qualities or attributes of one image are transferred to the other or others in the process of creating an analogy given the bond of similarity. From this it seems as if for Yeh analogy would be a clue to understand the contextual meaning of shivering in this poem.

In this formulation, the images of the red leaves and the burning flame inform the contextual meaning of the act of shivering, which is different from its original usage. The leaves actively show their inner strength in a dynamic confrontation, testimony to a vitality in manifesting independence and autonomy. The power relation between the leaves and the wind changes when the poet forges the image of “red leaves in souging wind”. The movement of red leaves underlies the sound of wind—souging. This sound caused by the rustling from falling leaves implies that they may be fluttering or flying in the air.<sup>56</sup> Naturally, leaves will not move if there is no wind. Conversely, this image implies that there is no such wind if the leaves do not move, since the wind is palpable because of its effects. In this formulation, the position of the red leaves is at least equal, if not superior, to the wind rather than subordinate according to the process involved in creating this image. Similarly, the image of a burning flame shows the release of the inner strength of the fire in dynamic confrontation. Burning as the movement of the flame shows the release of energy, namely the inner strength within the flame *per se*. In this sense, the burning flame is an active movement that represents independence and autonomy throughout the poem.

By means of analogy, shivering as the movement of the non-flowering branch which suggests a confrontation between the non-flowering branch and the wind, attests to the inner strength of the branch. Shivering thereby is not a movement driven by external power but generated from the inside of the non-flowering branch. By shivering, the branch actively releases its inner strength to fight against the wind rather than being a frightened and passively shaking object. The image of shivering thus gains a new meaning from its context,

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<sup>56</sup> In the original Chinese text, the adjective *xiaoxiao* not only denotes the whisper-like sound of wind but also indicates that the sound comes from the leaves rustling in the process of falling down. This adjective also suggests the bleak atmosphere of autumn.

as an active act to confront the wind, manifesting the independence and autonomy of the non-flowering branch, which is estranged from its earlier lexical meaning.

Moreover, the meaning of shiver is used more conspicuously as an autonomous act in a confrontation in “The Early Morning Stroll”, a poem written on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1945, about ten days later than “The Non-Flowering Branch”.

The meaning of shiver here, like the poetic function operating in “The Non-Flowering Branch”, is constructed by its *equivalence relations* to the images juxtaposed in a parallel structure. Structurally, the image of shivering along with two other images are juxtaposed in the second stanza which interrupts the poet’s linear narrative of her feelings about her morning stroll. In this exceptional stanza, three images - “a cool breeze”, “shivering leaves” and “the blue sky”-are constructed in parallel structure by the repetition of grammatical structure and sound. This stanza is as follows:

A cool breeze, shivering leaves,  
  
the blue-sky fragments in the cracks between leaves,  
  
like pieces of blue glass,  
  
we can sew a new pattern with them,  
  
bring it back to hang from the roof corner. (8-12)

The meaning of shiver is once again constructed as an active movement with autonomy by associating it with the other two images. Because of the parallel structure, the relationships between the first three images are rearranged. The new spatial relationship between the leaves and sky suggests that shivering as the movement of the leaves is now powerful in its own right, sufficiently strong to threaten the physical pre-eminence of the sky.



In a number of Chen's other poems, written in the same period, the enduring strength manifested by the act of shivering, as discovered from the reading above, is related to a sign of hope, implying an outlook of a bright future. This symbolism, associating the act of shivering with the idea of hope, suggests that the movement of shiver is both active and autonomous.

In "The Fresh Thirsty" ("Xinxian de Jiaoke") the meaning of shiver is equated with hope by the parallelism between the image of the sun, birds and the act of shiver. In the second stanza, the poet writes:

But I shall miss more  
the unpredictable days in the future;  
regarding hope the dusk is always like the dawn,  
has the sun, has the flying birds,  
has the shiver when the breeze touches the tree. (6-10)

Three phrases individually present these three images. The sun, as the source of energy, manifests autonomous power as it radiates light and heat; the birds show their autonomy in their chattering and flitting around. Compliant with the rule of parallel structure, the shiver of the tree is an autonomous act analogous to both sun and birds. To establish the equivalence of hope, the poet names the three images shared by the dusk and dawn. Of the three images, the sun and the birds are the familiar representatives of dawn. They appear in the early morning and indicate the start of a day. Thus, both the sun and the birds often symbolise hope by alluding to a beginning. Because the shiver of the tree is the equivalent of the sun and the birds, the shiver gains the associative meaning as autonomous an act as those belonging to the

sun and the birds, pointing to the idea of hope. In this sense, the meaning of shiver, as an autonomous act, is associated with the idea of hope, originating from the power of vitality.

In another poem, “The Edge outside the Edge”, the shiver of dew is linked to hope by a simile. The parallel structure of the final stanza establishes two pairs of equivalence relations: “I” and “the dew” are one pair and “young grassland” and “fresh shiver” are the other. The poet writes:

Outside the embankment of the night  
  
I possess a field of young grassland,  
  
over there the dew has  
  
a fresh shiver;  
  
it spreads like  
  
a field of green hope,  
  
extending tenderly  
  
towards the edge outside the edge. (24-31)

In this poem, shivering dew is juxtaposed with the “young grassland” and this symbolises hope by the similar parallel structure.

These examples suggest a deliberate poetic estrangement of the act of shivering. The images of shivering, the performance of the weak, in Chen’s poetry of ‘new beauty’ is active and powerful rather than passive and fearful which, just as it did in H.D.’s poetry, indicates a harsh aesthetic.

An examination all of the poems collected chronologically in *Overflow* reveals that the revised meaning of shiver is consistently formed as a new and unexpected poetic pattern.

As a result of this, the use of the revised meaning of shiver in the third volume “Looking out at Tomorrow” is used exclusively as the embodiment of Chen’s ‘new beauty’.

The use of the word shiver, in fact, appears first in the second volume of *Overflow*, “Crossing the Night” (“Heng guo Ye”), although it is less frequent than the third one. There are five poems in “Crossing the Night” containing the word “shiver”. In these poems, the meaning of shiver is used in its conventional lexical meaning, indicating passivity and weakness through the domination of a mysterious overwhelming power. In the poem “Autumn” (“Qiu”), for the first use of the word “shiver”, the movement of shiver suggests that the speaker of this poem feels overwhelmed. The poet writes in the second stanza:

Who is plucking the mysterious bow?

The shivering string

falling deeply into in the mountain

the *ding-dong* sound of logging. (5-8)

The sound of the shivering string is a trope for the sound of trees being cut. By using this metaphor, the poet mystifies the tree-cutting sounds as the acts of a transcendent god, an anthropomorphic power of nature. The string thus shivers in a passive way because the movement is caused and controlled by an external power or authority. The sound made by shivering that imply passivity and weakness corresponds to the “silent hide” of the speaker of this poem due to the fear of an overwhelming, even an occult, power. In this sense, the poet appears to create a scene that a transcendent power is in charge. Conversely, the shivering string of a bow becomes independent and autonomous in “String and Arrow” (“Xian yu Jian”). Chen writes: “On the shivering string / the burnished arrow is in tension” (1-2). In this expression, the external power is dismissed, since the shivering string empowers the arrow. Whereas the image of shivering implies a perplexed and uncertain feeling in “Windy Night”

("Feng Ye"), written in 1942. In this poem, a black cat is seen walking around on the roof on a windy night, its eyes like shivering fire. The poet attempts to read something from the "fire" in the cat's eyes and repeatedly asks two questions: did you lose something and what are you searching for? Thus, the shivering cat and the constantly blowing wind suggest a restless, anxious search, manifesting the bewildered, ungrounded feelings of the poet. The image of shivering changes into an expression of certainty and hope in the poetry of 'new beauty'. In "Crossing the Night" (which shares the title of the volume), the shiver of grass in the silent night, which corresponds to the silence of sleeping eyes, is also passive. Similarly, the movement of shiver is related to that of extinguishing in the poem "Echoes". The poet asks: "Is your window shivering, / your fire extinguishing?" (3-4). These examples reveal that the word "shiver" is used on the basis of a familiar understanding, a pre-existing meaning, suggesting a passive movement that implies weakness and dying.

The difference in the meaning accorded to shiver in poems written in different periods makes the pattern of the estranged act of shiver quite distinctive. The contrast between the meanings of shiver in the two volumes thus reveals an evident new use of the expression in the third. The pejorative meaning of shiver in the second volume is now dramatically transformed to imply strength and survival. The recurrence of this new use in such an intensive way forms a poetic pattern based on the revised meaning of shiver, suggesting an autonomous act in a confrontation that shows not frailty and capitulation but rather strength and vitality. In this sense, the intensive recurrence of shiver with its revised meanings suggests that the revision is a potent, rhetorically effective strategy for the poet. Shiver therefore gains in associative richness progressively as Chen moves through the act of composing this series of poems so that the passive and weak becomes active and powerful in a new dynamic confrontation.

To summarise: a formalist reading of H.D. and Chen's poetry collected in their first poetry collection reveals that the poetic pattern of 'new beauty' shows distinctive and novel aesthetic merits. A comparison of H.D. and Chen's poetry of 'new beauty' shows a joint concept formulated by a harsh aesthetic pattern. Both poets have envisioned a new aesthetic principle by constructing a distinctive and radically new poetic form. Their notions of 'new beauty' share the merits of strength and hardness of independence and autonomy embodied in dynamic confrontation and paradox. In both H.D.'s poems and Chen's, the beautiful is invoked by weakness confronting violence. During this confrontation, the vulnerable object confronts violence through summoning strength and activeness from within, a process that reveals the former's independence and autonomy. Moreover, the 'new beauty' embodied in the survival of the flowers and plants in both poets' formulation is optimistic, as it points to hope and futurity. This harsh aesthetic pattern is formed by empowering the imagery of conventionalised beautiful and (or) weak objects, an empowerment realised by what Viktor Shklovsky terms the device of estrangement in poetry.

### 3.2 The Creation of 'new beauty': poetic estrangement and the 'reality' perceived by a female body

The above reading shows a harsh aesthetic of 'new beauty' which is realised by empowering the imagery of the weak through estrangement. This irony is produced by the poetic device of estrangement that foregrounds the new in 'new beauty'. The images of 'new beauty' which are coined from transforming the accustomed associations of imagery correspond to what Shklovsky terms as "the creation of imagery". Furthermore, I argue that

the creation of the imagery of 'new beauty' suggests that this creation reflects a 'reality' captured by a female body.

Poetic estrangement, in terms of Shklovsky's theory of *ostranenie*, is a device which translates human perception into language by violating its normal usage. On this basis, estrangement is a strategy to create fresh poetic images. Shklovsky distinguishes two ways of treating images in poetry as disposition and creation. He criticises:

From century to century, from country to country, from poet to poet, these images march on without change. They belong to "no one", except to "God". The more you try to explain an epoch, the more you are convinced that the images you thought were created by a given poet were, in reality, passed on to him by others with hardly a change. The work of successive schools of poetry has consisted essentially in accumulating and making known new devices of verbal arrangement and organization. In particular, these schools of poetry are far more concerned with the disposition than with the creation of imagery. (2)

Shklovsky remarks that the disposition of images is not an artistic work, because it has little to do with "thinking" in images but "recollecting" them (2). Subsequently, he claims that our mode of perception is the basis for artistic creation. He continues: "In a narrow sense, we shall call a work artistic if it has been created by special devices whose purpose is to see to it that these artifacts are interpreted artistically as much as possible." (2) Thus, he states that the purpose of art is to lead us to the knowledge of a thing by a direct and concrete perception rather than a mechanical recognition through an encounter with ready-made language products.

Estrangement, in terms of Shklovsky's theory, is an effective way to rescue the perception of objective things from conventionalised language by (re)connecting language to

bodily experience—be it Russian, Chinese or English. He argues that “By ‘estranging’ objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and ‘laborious’” (6). In this way, we can “return sensation to limbs”, to “feel objects”, “to make a stone stony” (6). The perceptual process thus extends to its fullest. Douglas Robinson contends that this effect of estrangement is not depersonalisation but (re)personalisation (118). The method of estrangement removes objective things from the sphere of automatised perception by constructing an impeded and distorted speech and reintroduces them to the viewer. In this sense, poetic estrangement restores sensation to life as well as to poetry. The body is thereby a channel connecting connecting the external world and the human mind. Experience flows through the external world and the mind. The estranging language registers the organised experience of body, translating it into poetry by means of images, metaphors, and poetic structures. In terms of psychology, Robinson names this poetic language “the somatics of language” (xviii). By means of estrangement in poetry, the void of the automatised symbol is replaced by the awareness of the somatic, embodied response that gives us our sense of reality, our feeling for matter, our sense of contact with the material world.

Shklovsky’s theory thus reveals that the estrangement implies the presence of a human body in the poetic image which is newly created in the poetic text. The created poetic image conveys a bodily experience based on perception. With respect to disposing a ready-made image, the poet (writer) who uses the image does not engage with it. The image, in this sense, is void. Conversely, a body-mediated relationship between the writing subject and the external world is the fountain of image creation. The newly created image derived from new perceptions of the external world thus suggests the existence of a perceiving subject. As the products of this creative mechanism, the images of ‘new beauty’ hence reflect the direct and concrete bodily connection of H.D. and Chen to their situations.

A diachronic reading of the poems collected in *Sea Garden* and *Overflow* suggests a change of these two poets' view of their surrounding world and their own conditions of existence. This change of world-view is reflected by the difference in the treatment of the imagery of borderline and weak objects (actions). The treatment of these forms of imagery change over time and is particularly evident in the development observed respectively in *Sea Garden* and *Overflow*. The same natural objects or actions perform differently in the poetry of 'new beauty' and the poetry written before it. Apart from the distinctive borderline images, those images showing the strength and hardness of independence and autonomy in the poetry of 'new beauty' merely suggest melancholy and vulnerability in the poetry written before the new strategy emerges. Unlike the poetry of 'new beauty' imbued with optimism and the strength of independence and autonomy, poetry written before it shows passivity, weakness and defeat. The poetry of 'new beauty' thus marks a distinct shift from expressing self-uncertainty to conveying a new self-recognition and self-assurance. As I argue, this change is engendered by a shift of viewpoint from a male-centred stance to a female-centred one.

Here I exemplify the changes implied in the use of the borderline to illustrate the change of the poets' perception of their situations. The geographic borderline between land and sea in H.D.'s poetry and the temporal one symbolised by autumn and dusk in Chen's is a metaphor for the battlefield for their fight for freedom. As H.D. and Chen inaugurate their poetic career by self-imposed exile, borderline images are central to their poetry. The image of the sea, for instance, frequently plays an important role in H.D.'s early poetry. H.D. left the coastline of the western Atlantic and crossed the ocean to the new land to start her own adventure. In *The American H.D.* (2012), Annette Debo argues that the central imagery of sea in H.D.'s early poetry reflects her self-imposed exile and adventure and shows her resistance to be domesticated and untameable, a place of freedom (35-36). This freedom thus means not only removing constraints on her but also the freedom that she finds in creating. In the same



vein, the imagery of dusk and autumn are central borderline-symbols for Chen. Both dusk and autumn as a borderline are attached to the significance of departing, giving the impression of transition and changing. From the first poems written after they left their parental families, the imagery of a geographic or temporal borderline begins to appear in their poems on a regular basis. The examination of these images of borderline thus can indicate their perception of and attitudes to their situations.

The poem “Hermes of the Ways”, for example, consisting of two parts and written in 1912, exemplifies H.D.’s melancholy feelings in presenting a seaside picture including the image of wind, sand, and waves just as the later poetry of ‘new beauty’ does. The image of the border between land and sea along with the waves and the wind reveals, however, a more complex situation of human existence, one which contrasts with the activeness and autonomy manifested by a similar assembly of images in the later poetry. Compared with the optimistic survival in the dynamic confrontation created at the border between land and sea in the poetry of ‘new beauty’, this seaside setting in “Hermes of the Ways” is a site that witnesses the struggle for existence, clouded by scepticism. The doubt of existence is expressed by the speaker of the poem, who is standing at the restless, conflicted scene as described in the second stanza:

Far off over the leagues of it,  
  
the wind,  
  
playing on the wide shore,  
  
piles little ridges,  
  
and the great waves  
  
break over it. (4-9)

At this scene of a border of conflict, Hermes is introduced:

But more than the many-foamed ways

of the sea,

I know him

of the triple path-ways,

Hermes,

who awaits. (10-15)

On the one hand, Hermes is considered as a vision of the poet emerging from the border, because Hermes, as the god of transitions and boundaries, echoes the multi-ways at the border. On the other hand, the appearance of the god functions as a projection of the poet, because he is the guide of souls who may speak the thoughts and feelings of the poet at that moment.<sup>57</sup> In addition, however, Hermes is presented as an image of doubt and bewilderment, since he “awaits” and is “Dubious, / Facing three ways” (16-17). In this sense, the hesitating god reveals the doubtful poet who hides behind the poem.

The struggles in the second part are demonstrated by the survival of deformed apples and the twisted small-leafed boughs. Both apples and boughs are caught and ill-shaped by dimness. The apples are ripened by the “desperate sun” looming in the sea-mist, while the boughs are twisted by “bafflings”. The sea is not an equal but an overwhelming power in this part because it “gnashed its teeth about me”. At this scene, Hermes “Have waited, / Where sea-grass tangles with / shore-grass” (52-54). The god remains in a state of non-action, not

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<sup>57</sup> Timothy Materer provides an insight in interpreting Hermes in this poem by relating the god to a mythological and philosophical tradition rather than simply defining this figure as a male persona or patron of H.D. See his argument in the book *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult* (1995).

indicating directions or providing any help. The entanglement of grass reinforces the impression of perplexity.

“Hermes of the Ways” reveals that the poet lives in uncertainty and perplexity and lacks self-assurance. The unstable surroundings under the overwhelming destructive power of the sea appear to weaken the speaker’s mental faculties, which symbolises that the poet does not have a clear picture of herself and her situation. Moreover, the poet inscribes self-doubt in this poem by creating Hermes as a transcendent power to rely on in the first place. To reinforce this impression of perplexity, the poet projects herself into the poem as the figure of the dubious Hermes without action in an unclear situation.

The treatment of the imagery of border clearly reveals Chen’s uncertainty and self-doubt before the birth of the poetry of ‘new beauty’. The imagery of dusk is the symbol of perplexity and frustration in the poems written in the 1930s rather than hope as in the poetry of ‘new beauty’ (such as “The Fresh Thirsty”). In “On the Rickshaw” (“Che Shang”), dusk evokes loneliness and bewilderment. This poem narrates how a traveller walking in the dusk loses her footprints. She opens this poem with a negative phrase “cannot see” and ends it with a corresponding negativity that is “no light can illuminate / the lost footprint” (8-9). In the poem “Yellow” (“Huang”), the dusk is dim, evoking an imagined representation of fading memories unearthed from the dust of the past. Dusk, in this sense, is not only the literary transition from day to night, but also a threshold between the past and the present. The dim light in the dusk casts a shadow flickering on the wall causing the speaker to sigh. In “Autumn”, the speaker of this poem, unlike the combative one in “The Non-Flowering Branch”, is weak and negative. Chen writes:

In your mystery song

I will hide myself quietly

Sealing my night with

Light frost. (9-12)

This stanza as the final one of the poem ends it with the act of enclosure, such as hiding and sealing, revealing the poet's perplexity and frustration.

The above examples reveal the doubt and uncertainty of the poets about their state of existence. There is a puzzled speaker who cannot grasp her shifting surroundings through her maybe misplaced body. The place of the body is uncertain, either changing quickly or seen as vague in the dim twilight, implying their self-imposed exiles. In this situation, the body is confined to this uncertainty since there is no way out and no liberating directions. However, rather than a place of destruction, with the 'new beauty', the borderline, such as the seaside and autumn, becomes a place for contesting, confrontation and eventually, the generation of something substantially different.

From this optimistic and powerful form of expression, there is the growing self-assurance of H.D. and Chen who were now able to transform their earlier treatment of ambiguity and frustration into a new and powerful/authoritative clarity. Self-assurance is manifested in the certainty of the present through rewriting the body and its response to its surroundings. Once formerly passive objects take action, they assume the subject-position in this confrontation. Thus a self-awareness emerges. The environment is also now clearly, rather than presented in a vague and indistinct manner. The border of the sea, in H.D.'s 'new beauty' poetry, is not formless under the attack of the waves but solid enough to ground the flowers and plants, despite their shifting and loose attachment to the ground. In Chen's new poetry, the dusk acquires the presence of the sun rather than being viewed as a dim "yellow" colour while the dew on the grassland can be seen shivering proactively in the dark night. To situate the body in a distinct and clear environment suggests that the poets have become more

aware of the particularity and abilities of their own bodies. In other words, they have become certain of their existence. The strong belief in self-survival replaces the advent of illusionary saviours. The superior other, such as the god as the patron or the dominator who is created as the rescuer, a symbol of hope, disappears in the poetry of 'new beauty'. The poets relocate their faith in their own independent actions. The flowers and plants in H.D.'s 'new beauty' poetry withstand by actively fighting back rather than passively perishing; the leaves and grass in Chen's 'new beauty' poems shiver to survive. In this way, the poets reveal their self-assurance in independence and autonomy manifested by the equal relationship between themselves and the external world. Furthermore, the self-pity in the speaker of the poems (the "I") compared to a privileged "you" in a higher and brighter position is replaced by the revalued lesser flowers and plants fighting at the border of the sea or the newly vindicated shivering branch. The inferiority of the speaker I thus is restored as the agency with equal rights to any counterpart.

In these different ways, an independent and autonomous voice emerges from the optimistic and powerful poetry of 'new beauty', and replaces a song of melancholy spoken in a hesitating and doubting voice. In this sense, the 'new beauty' poetry of both H.D. and Chen signals a significant poetic turn, revealing the development of self-understanding and recognition that facilitates a movement from a trapped and sceptical self to one of certainty and assurance.

To relate the transformation of the poetic images to the poets' personal lives outlined in Chapter Two reveals that the former echoes the transition of the two poets' personal struggle for freedom. In other words, this poetic change is derived from the two poets' ability to free their bodies from patriarchal authorities, namely what I have termed the completion of the so-called *three escapes*. From questioning themselves to believing in their survival and

future, this change witnesses a renewed world-view from an unmediated female body engaged with the external world.

The new narrative of the situations of the two poets suggests that the poets change their viewpoint of their own state of being, from a male-centred one to a female-centred one. As Beauvoir observes, the man, according to a patriarchal formulation, is the subject and a woman only can determine and differentiate herself in relation to him (6). H.D. and Chen's self-imposed exile informs us of their brave adventure to struggle for an opportunity to break this prescribed dependence, in order to achieve self-determine. At the outset of their writing, the two poets saw their situation purely from the standpoint of males. In this sense, there existed a symbolic screen between their bodies and the external world. As a consequence, they cannot configure their existence clearly due to their distorted relation to the external world. Although writing and publishing poems, their articulation is not free to reflect their 'reality' without a struggle. These ambiguous and puzzling feelings thus are described with such expressions as "suffocated" ("Sheltered Garden") and "imprisoned" ("The Angel in Prison") in their writing. In this sense, they regarded themselves as weak and inferior and possessing a limited sense of future. This uncertainty is revealed by the expressions of melancholy and self-indulgence in the early poetry which is imbued with anxiety and frustration. In the later poetry of 'new beauty', the depiction of their situation, however, is different. The change of their personal situations suggests the reason for the difference in attitude to their situations. That is they are finally able to view the world through their own eyes, allowing them to adopt a uniquely female standpoint and thus to construct a new, self-assured relation to the external world and to temporality: their immediate present and the future. The pressure caused by gender bias which made them anxious is replaced by a self-confidence. Due to this change, the weak body is not automatically a source of melancholy but it is a source of power. The demand for equal participation reflects the fact that Chen and

H.D. can finally posit themselves as free through the certainty of their existence. In this new relation to their internal and external world, they accept their weakness in appearance and physical power on the one hand but demand equality on the other. The voice in the poetry of ‘new beauty’, which stands on their own individuality and autonomy, carries subjective significance and values, and is represented in the rewriting of their real, historical situations. Therefore, we see their conditions of existence from their own perspective from the time of the poetry of ‘new beauty’ onwards.

That which is used to define their situations as vulnerable and secondary in the first place becomes what the poets now refuse and resist. In terms of Shklovsky’s theory, this negation of the conventionalised images of garden and shivering by replacing them with new ones is a reclaiming of a female-body-based perception and understanding of the external world. The poetry of ‘new beauty’ inscribes their personal transition to an embodied reality.

### 3.3 Formation of a Revolutionary Discourse: from the creation of images to the judgment of beauty

The preceding analysis suggests that the creation of images of ‘new beauty’ marks a turning point in their poetry, from a melancholy and painful voice to a more determined and confident articulation: the emergence of a female-centred subject. The female body is not only a site to generate new perceptions but also a place to produce new meanings, which is what Kristeva called a “signifying practice” in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. The combination of the theory of Shklovsky and Kristeva reveals that the new concept constructed by poetic images of ‘new beauty’ links the perceiving subject to a judging subject. I apply Kristevan theory of text as a signifying practice to reveal that the poetry of

‘new beauty’ which constructs the new concept is a discourse of beauty with a female-centred subject. I argue that this discourse narrates a new relationship between a female *I* and her external world through a judgment of beauty which negotiates with traditional formulations.

Kristeva posits a theory to account for how a subject position is formed within language by the dynamic between the body and external objects. In the process of constructing a signifying practice, she posits a body as “not a unity but a plural totality with separate members that have no identity but constitute the place where drives are applied” (101). In this formulation, the archaic dismembered body is static and can only be activated by a signifying practice. She further explains that in any signifying practice, the “structuring of drive facilitations through invested objects becomes meaningful, represents, or signifies—by image or word—entities, experiences, subjects and ideologies” (102). In Kristeva’s formulation, the meaning constructed in language is produced by the dynamics between the body of the speaking (writing) subject and his/her external world. In other words, the construction of meaning in language reflects the relationship between *I* and the *other*. The meaning, in this sense, narrates a bodily reality. As Kristeva contends, the subject proposes the representation of “relation to natural objects, social apparatuses, and the body proper” (126). The reality thus corresponds to a specific signifying practice, which either agree with social norms or disagree them. As a result, the new meaning in the signifying practice either within the social symbolism or reject it and symbolise the objective process of transformation by violence to forms a revolutionary discourse (205).

Kristevan theory accounts for how the body functions by the appropriation of drives to shape new relationship to the external world and how this process is brought into language by text. In this sense, a new subject position in the text is formed to articulates a new ‘reality’. In the meantime, the poetic estrangement, the distorted linguistic form, reveals the conflict of the articulating subject with the society. Gender, in H.D. and Chen’s case,



therefore, functions through a body, interacting with other elements at work and collectively forming a signifying practice. Gendered perceptions are generated rather than prescribed thus a Kristevan formulation of the body suggests that the nature of gender used to view the world can be changed because it is not pre-given but is formed within language.

As with Kristevan theory, the images of 'new beauty', the empowered imagery of the weak, reveal an articulation of a female-centred judgment of beauty. The empowerment of the weak imagery, a new meaning which replaces the original meaning inscribed in the image, is the result of the signifying practice. The effect of empowerment enters language by the poetic estrangement. In H.D.'s poetry, the sea garden located in a wild place is exposed to nature and subject to violent natural forces. Tortured by the wind and waves, the smell of the flowers becomes pungent and their body-shape, defective. They are not as fully or perfectly shaped as flowers that grow in good conditions. They have few leaves and petals and some are broken. In this sense, the poet presents a garden of beauty beyond the conventional understanding. In Chen's poetry, both the non-flowering branch and the leaves in the wind are shivering for not fear but survival and hope. The objects which are conventionally considered as small and weak, such as the flowers (especially broken ones), leaves, and grass, are transformed into something strong and powerful. One step further, the poet praise their beauty not because of their weakness but their strength. This formulation thus reveals a 'new beauty' as *what it is not* compared to conventional beauty. In this sense, the 'new beauty' is foregrounded as an absence. Given that the original meaning of shiver remains in play, however, allows these two poets to use it as the basis for paradoxically manifesting the 'new beauty'. In this sense, the original meanings and corresponding knowledge of the object are dropped from these images and new meanings are given by the poetry in question. The beauty in flowers and plants in the sea garden calls for another synthesis when the conventionalised meaning of beauty is dismissed. In the process of signifying these images of

‘new beauty’ by estrangement, the poets signify the meaning of ‘new beauty’. In this sense, we see a new judgment of beauty reflects a female bodily reality from the empowered imagery of the weak, such as a powerful broken rose and leaves. The voice articulated from the subject position is a female-centred judgment of beauty. The poetry of ‘new beauty’ thus becomes a revolutionary discourse of beauty which challenges the social symbolism of aesthetics.

At the same time, the process of poetic estrangement, which works to empower formerly weak and passive objects, implies a process of defamiliarisation, a poetic device that aims to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived rather than as they are known (Greene, et al. 643). In the process of defamiliarisation and recalling Skhlovsky’s work in this field, the original meanings prescribed in the words and expressions are confronted and then replaced by their new contextual meanings.

Moreover, the voices implanted in the poetry of ‘new beauty’ foreground this negotiation. H.D. inserts a persona which shuttles back and forth by rhetorical questions. For example, a rhetorical question forms the final stanza of “Sea Rose”:

Can the spice-rose  
  
drip such acrid fragrance  
  
hardened in a leaf? (14-16)  
  
and of “Sea Poppies”:  
  
Beautiful, wide-spread,  
  
fire upon leaf,  
  
what meadow yields

so fragrant a leaf

as your bright leaf? (13-17)

These rhetorical questions form a competition between two kind of flowers which respectively represent ‘new beauty’ and conventionalised beauty. In the examples, H.D. uses rhetorical questions to invite a reconsideration of the conventionalised images whereby the images that represent ‘new beauty’ are privileged.

Similarly, Chen takes a strongly subjective perspective in the poetry of ‘new beauty’ by directly asserting statements and questions. As in “Non-Flowering Branch”, the speaker states “I love only” which indicates the attitude that champions one form of image over the other. In the ensuing stanza, the speaker appears once again asking

Can you tell me, what I would be?

Thinking of it, I am the flame, and

How many times should I be burnt, towards death? (17-20).

The burning process refers not only to the flame, but also to the previous images of branch, leaves in the late autumn and ultimately the situation of the *I*. This intensive self-projection again clearly leaves poet’s sympathies in no doubt.

To recapitulate, the poetic voices enhance the negotiation between the two discourses of beauty in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, they formulate a ‘new beauty’ by questioning its pre-existing understanding, which means that the notion of beauty cannot remain fixed or monolithic; instead it tends towards plurality. On the other hand, these voices invite the reader’s engagement and thus suggest an intention that moves away from solipsism towards communication with the other.

In conclusion, the examination of the process of estrangement in the poetry of ‘new beauty’ reveals that H.D. and Chen re-signify their perceptions and experience based on their autonomous female bodies to produce a concept of ‘new beauty’ by translating images of vulnerability and failure so that they become compelling. And in moving beyond these new compelling figures, we discover a revolutionary discourse of beauty based on a female-bodily ‘reality’. In the next chapters, I examine the negotiation between these two poets as women who inhabit a socio-cultural dimension. My first focal point is the negotiation with the dominant aesthetic tradition. In Chapter Four, therefore, I investigate this negotiation through challenging, and subsequently redefining, the vocabulary of a dualistic aesthetics.

## Chapter Four: The Revision of a Tradition: A Challenge from a Female-Centred Aesthetics

The previous chapter configures a female-centred discourse of beauty and its negotiation with a dominant tradition which is generated from H.D. and Chen's personal gendered situations as they came to build their poetic careers. In this chapter, I continue this examination of the negotiation of beauty by locating it in a wider social-historical context, beyond their private concerns. I show how in redefining what has been a dominant aesthetic tradition, a narrative of the relationship between human beings and the material world is recast. This revision is an aesthetic response to the context of modernism that knowingly establishes a female-centred aesthetics.

### 4.1 The Power in Beauty: aesthetic pursuits during war

As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the poetry of 'new beauty' is an outcome generated from the encounter between these two poets' female bodies and the external world. Accordingly, this encounter gives rise to social responsibilities and a response to the radical social changes and crises of the time.

Living during times of war, both H.D. and Chen witnessed the collapse of human civilisation and experienced the terror of war. These crises urged them to rethink the relationship between the human being and the natural world and its significance for civilisation, art, and poetry. Both poets confronted a chaotic world and believed that a certain notion of beauty could become a path to discover reality, an ultimate "truth".

The experience of the Great War for H.D. was crucial, not only for her writing during the time but also for her ensuing poetic career. Norman Kelvin assigns a significant weight to this period in H.D.'s life in the essay "H.D. and the Years of World War I" (2000). In his introduction to H.D.'s prose collection *Notes on Thought and Vision and The Wise Sappho* (1982), Albert Gelpi remarks that this period for her is filled with both achievement and anxiety. He observes that the productivity and happiness in her career and marriage are short-lived and that the war drew H.D. and her contemporaries into "madness and destroyed their fragile world" (9-10). Moreover, H.D. subtly writes her own observations on war into her autobiographical novels published afterwards, such as *Asphodel* (1921-1922) and *Bid Me to Live* (1960). As an example, she depicts war-time London through the eyes of Julia Ashton (commonly considered as the persona of herself) in *Bid Me to Live*: "She had walked out of a dream, the fog and fever, the constant threat from the air, the constant reminder of death and suffering (those soldiers in blue hospital uniforms) into reality. This was real" (146). Beyond being an observer, H. D., as Matthew Kibble discovers in her fiction, makes her personal trauma "becom[e]. . . conflated in the text with the wider "blight" of the war" (541). He argues that H.D. observes a change in the whole culture of wartime London and writes this into her novels. Kibble notes: "H.D. perceives the risk of poetry caused by the war, since the latter brings with it a cheapened culture of propaganda and virulent xenophobia, together with a strengthening of gender stereotypes, and threatens to stifle the spirit of poetry" (541).

Similarly, Chen suffers directly from the impact of the War of Resistance, which broke out in 1937. Because of the Japanese military invasion, Chen and her other contemporaries (including Cao Baohua) are obliged to leave Beijing as refugees, signalling the end of the flowering literary society in Beijing. Chen writes of her complicated feelings, mixed with fear and anger, more directly in her prose. "A Picture of Fleeing away" describes

people from the Japanese occupied area on their way to seek refuge.<sup>58</sup> In terms of Chen's depiction, the occupation expelled people from their homes and the threat of the invaders was everywhere pervasive. "The Other Day at the Tianjin Railway Station" tells a story of how several university students were insulted by Japanese military policemen who went through the students' belongings and threatened them with guns. In this essay, Chen expresses her anxiety over the crisis of survival and progression of Chinese culture and identity. In "A Picture of Fleeing away" Chen laments: "[a]ll are ruined. We can only flee away, flee away" (561). Immediately, she raises the doubt: "Flee? But flee to where?" This is a voice containing mourning and doubt about her personal life, but it is also about the future of poetry and Chinese culture.

These radical social and cultural changes called for new approaches to represent the reality faithfully. The collapse of the flourishing pre-war literary world in both London and Beijing suggested that the literature and poetry needed to be rebuilt with a new vision. The war experience of these two poets suggests that their anxiety is not only caused by personal matters but also holds concerns for the future of art and the whole of human society under the threat of war. This anxiety gives rise to their sense of the social responsibility which furthers their poetic exploration. The revival and revaluation of beauty to re-establish the relationship between the human being and the world is their solution.

In her review of W. B. Yeats' poetry collection *Responsibilities* (1914), H.D. calls for a link between the revival of beauty and the artist's social responsibility.<sup>59</sup> In this essay, she seriously considers the responsibilities and tasks of the artists of her generation. She writes:

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<sup>58</sup> This essay along with "The Other Day at the Tianjin Railway Station" were written in 1938 and collectively published with the collection *The Starry Rain* in 1946.

<sup>59</sup> According to Gary Burnett's speculation, this review may be written in 1916. See Burnett, Gary. "A Poetics out of War: H.D.'s Responses to The First World War". *Agenda: H.D. Special Issue*, 1987. p. 57.

We cry out with the poet:

That men desert,

For some trivial affair

Or noisy, insolent sport,

Beauty that we have won from bitterest hours. (52)

She points out that the significance of Yeats's *Responsibilities* is that this poetry collection shows his worship of beauty rather than "the grace of steel girder". His poetry exemplifies a 'real' beauty. This so-called review was more like an essay expressing her modernist aesthetic declaration, a declaration for reviving beauty for the reality within it, because she confessed at its beginning that she had not been given access to the volume itself but wrote the review simply by "recalling an early impression" (51). Beauty redefined is a weapon for her to fight with the great enemy of their time — "the mechanical daemon, the devil of machinery, of which we can hardly repeat too often, the war is the hideous offspring" (52). She asserts, however, that there is another enemy, that it is a fact that "our generation did not stand against that enemy" (53). An exploration of beauty that connects the past and the future, as a humanist approach, is an important path to achieve a new order, a possible saviour. She states: "we are all a part of this world calamity, we [cannot] stand apart with Pharisaic gesture. But we can do this. We can wait, endure, confess the past was a mistake, turn to the future and hope for the generation to follow." (53). In H.D.'s view, the revival of beauty provides the means to endure and hope. One of the responsibilities of artists is to return beauty to the centrality of aesthetics.

In an essay titled "Flame—Burning and Glorifying" written in 1945, Chen contends that beauty is brought to light by the burning flame, a metaphor for self-devotion to art, science and human society. She exemplifies the process of reshaping a piece of metal by



burning. She writes: “[i]n the process of burning, you are like a piece of metal. When the fire is gradually melting you down, all that is fixed is destroyed and becomes flowing. Once you cool down, you will take a much beautiful shape and you will be stronger in quality than you were.” (644) In this sense, a consideration of beauty is intertwined with social responsibilities.

These ideas are theorised as the way to lead to ‘reality’ in their post-war writing. H.D. systematically discusses the notion of beauty in the essay “The Cinema and the Classics I: Beauty” (1927) published in the journal *Close Up*. Although it is written nearly ten years after the Great War, this essay, among others in the same issue, is taken as a summarisation of her early thoughts. Lura Marcus points out that “a number of tenets expressed in the ‘The Cinema and the Classics’ series echo H.D.’s imagist aesthetics” (96). “Beauty”, according to Marcus, is the most important one. This essay starts from H.D.’s disappointment at the movie star Greta Garbo’s performance in the Hollywood movie “Torrent” (1926) and ends with a proposal of a theory of beauty. She criticises the fact that the image of Garbo is “deflowered, deracinated, devitalized, more than that, actively and acutely distorted by an odd unbelievable parody of life, of beauty” (106). She laments how “[w]ell beauty has been slurred over and laughed at and forgotten”. She claims that “beauty was made to endure, in men, in flowers, in spirits and in minds” (107). At the end of this essay, she summarises:

And beauty, among other things, is reality, and beauty once in so many hundred years, raises a wan head, suddenly decides to avenge itself for all the slights that it has negligently accepted, sometimes through weariness, sometimes through sheer omnipotence, sometimes through cynicism or through boredom. (109)

In this exploration of beauty, she emphasises the relationship between it and reality, revealing her dislike for the decorative and vulgar beauty and restating her pursuit of a beauty of hardship.

Chen also restates her notion of beauty in a poem titled “The Meditation” (“Moxiang”) written in 1947 which is collected in *The Symphony*. This poem bespeaks Chen’s pursuit of beauty, which echoes the ‘new beauty’ in “The Non-Flowering Branch”. The poet writes:

Lifting up all disguise,

To seek for the ultimate ‘truth’,

The most beautiful is forged in the defective,

Undergoing ten thousand kalpas<sup>60</sup> to reach eternal life. (10-13)

The pursuit of attractive appearance, suggested by the quotation above, is merely a disguise impeding the search for beauty. In order to remove this disguise, beauty must be forged from the defective. In the process, the apparently defective is subjected to being forged and tempered. This process is what the poet called “the only direction / leading to beauty” (18-19) in another poem “Friendship and Distance”, when she expresses her happiness and determination to pursue ‘beauty’. In the essay “Discussing Poetry with Fang Jing” (“He Fang Jing Tan Shi”), she again restates the fact that a portion of beauty is built upon a portion of truth.

Both poets’ aesthetic pursuits reveal that beauty is the only way to access ‘reality’.

This is the solution they provide to the war time social crises, since it is the fundamental way

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<sup>60</sup> The kalpa is referred to an immense period of time, reckoned as 4,320 million human years, and considered to be the length of a single cycle of the cosmos from creation to dissolution in Hindu and Buddhist tradition. In this poem, Chen uses this term in a figurative way—a common secular usage in Chinese context to emphasises the bitterness that accompanies forging a ‘real’ beauty.

to know the changing world and to transform it into a better one. Beauty emerges from a trial, during which one must test its inner strength, enduring and surviving from the resulting violence and finally emerging to acknowledge its power; its authority.

All these virtues are inscribed in the images of ‘new beauty’. From the poetry, the stale formula of conventionalised beauty is met with discontent. For example, to return to “Sheltered Garden”, the poet transforms a well-protected garden into a wind-attacked one to show its real attributes. The speaker of this poem asks:

Why not let the pears cling  
to the empty branch?  
All your coaxing will only make  
a bitter fruit—  
let them cling, ripen of themselves,  
test their own worth,  
nipped, shrivelled by the frost,  
to fall at last but fair  
With a russet coat. (25-33)

A sea garden reifies the poet’s aesthetic pursuit. In the sea-flower quintet, the broken and weak flowers stand in shifting sands or pebbles, confronting the harsh wind and waves. However, they endure and survive. In Chen’s poetry, this anticipation of pursuing beauty is delicately illuminated and exemplified by the image of the shivering non-flowering branch. The branch becomes defective because its glamorous flowers are removed but the beauty of it lies in the movement of shivering that forms a dynamic process of confrontation. The branch

confronts the chilly wind and experiences a test, suffering yet surviving. In this sense, the movement of shivering is a touch-stone of the existence of ‘new beauty’. In the same vein, the leaves are late autumn leaves without bright colour and healthy shape. However, the poet praises them because they are flying in the air rather than withering on the tree. The flame, like the one depicted in “Flame—Burning and Glorifying”, is beautiful because it is burning. In this way, defective appearances conversely foreground the proactive nature –the essence – of the ‘new beauty’.

Moreover, these carefully re-evaluated and transformed images in the poetry of ‘new beauty’ can equally be considered as metaphors for wartime situations. The ‘borderline’ corresponds to the battlefield. The violence of the wind and waves symbolise the physicality of war and the flowers and plants can be read as suffering human beings. In this respect, endurance and inner strength suggest the way to survive. An accompanying sense of hope and future suggest ultimate confidence and optimism for human survival. With this vision, the human race can survive and the broken world be reorganised. In this sense, the discourse of ‘new beauty’, beyond private aesthetic interests, posits an investment in a powerful form of beauty as an aesthetic response to the wartime social changes and crises.

#### 4.2 The Revival of Beauty: empowered beauty beyond the dualistic aesthetic tradition

The revival of a certain authority in beauty suggests the negotiation between ‘new beauty’ and conventionalised beauty. By comparing these two concepts, I argue that the concept of ‘new beauty’, which claims dynamic power, destabilises the vocabulary of beauty in a dualistic aesthetic tradition.

#### 4.2.1 Dualistic Aesthetics and Its Influence

From a contemporary perspective, the beautiful and the sublime are two different categories of aesthetics. Over centuries, philosophers, critics and artists have contributed their understanding of the beautiful and the sublime to the conceptualisation of these two forms of aesthetic experience but the division between the two did not exist at the origins of inquiries into human aesthetic experience. In order to foreground the uniqueness in the discourse of ‘new beauty’, the ‘reality’ discovered from these two poets’ practice, the failure of traditional philosophy to register the new poetics requires detailed explanation. Thus, my study here focusses on the splitting of these two categories in order to examine the binaries exhibited by modern aesthetics against which the concept of ‘new beauty’ is formulated.

To flesh out the negotiation of the two concepts of beauty in question, I contour a modern aesthetic tradition based on the dualism between the beautiful and the sublime since the eighteenth century in the West, including its influence in China. I term this tradition a Burke-Kantian one because not only they are the most influential philosophers who formulate and deepen this dualism from the outset of the establishment of modern aesthetics but also were the first introduced (especially Kant) Western aestheticians in China. In this tradition, beauty is morally assigned an inferior position compared with sublimity because of its apparent passivity.

The divorce of the beautiful and the sublime was accompanied by the independence of the latter as a superior concept in line with the rise of modern aesthetics. The sublime was initially formulated in opposition to the beautiful at the time of their separation. This relationship of opposition has been institutionalised and deepened by Edmund Burke and

Immanuel Kant, whose works provide a paradigm of dualism between the beautiful and the sublime as two quite different categories in aesthetics.

The sublime as a distinct aesthetic experience began to depart from the beautiful once the former was addressed separately. Over centuries in Western philosophy, beauty or the beautiful has been used to refer to a pleasing sensible experience, despite its generality. However, as early as the time of ancient Greece, Plato observed that beauty was not only of one type. He distinguished two types of beauty: beauty as harmony and proportion between the parts, and beauty as splendour.<sup>61</sup> The latter, as a centrifugal feeling of beauty, remained within the concept of beauty as something of a challenge to philosophy until the translation of *On the Sublime* appeared first in French and then English in the late seventeenth century.<sup>62</sup> The sublime, according to Robert Doran's recent research in *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (2015), quickly gained the attention of critics and philosophers and during the eighteenth century there was a shift in the sublime referring to from a rhetorical method to an aesthetic term (6-8). However, the fact that beauty as a concept remained both very general and unclear limited the reach of the then heated discussion on beauty and taste promoted by the rise of the bourgeoisie. Naming the deviant feeling in the experience of beauty thus became an urgent matter for the eighteenth-century debate on taste. As Doran notes, the term "sublime" helped theorists in the eighteenth century to address a different experience from the beautiful (8). The sublime was introduced to deepen the discussion on taste, since the sublime as a term that registers awe and inspiring feelings in literature echoes similar feelings aroused by nature, namely the feeling of natural, frequently overwhelming grandeur in the beautiful. At this point, an independent concept of the sublime is formed to

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<sup>61</sup> Umberto Eco notes that Plato explains beauty in harmony and proportion and beauty of geometrical forms in *Timaeus* and the beauty in splendour in *Phaedrus* (48).

<sup>62</sup> The *On the Sublime* is attributed to Longinus in the 1st or 3rd century AD in ancient Greek. For Longinus, the sublime is an adjective that describes great, elevated, or lofty thought or language, particularly in the context of rhetoric.

further the exploration of aesthetic experience. The development of the concept of the sublime as an aesthetic quality in nature distinct from beauty was first brought into prominence in the eighteenth century in the writings of three Englishmen: Anthony Ashley-Cooper (the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury), John Dennis and Joseph Addison.<sup>63</sup>

The naming of the sublime boosted the development of aesthetic study, for as Doran remarks, the vicissitudes of the notion of aesthetics cannot be easily separated from the emergence of the sublime (17). Thus, the boundary of the concept of beauty was clarified by the introduction of this new term. With the development of the discussion of taste, it became urgent for theorists and critics to theorise the judgment of beauty in a more detailed and precise way. Naming the sublime prepared the establishment of a new vocabulary for aesthetics as a coming-into-being discipline. Doran addresses its importance in developing aesthetics:

[I]f experiences of overpowering awe, emotional transport, sacred terror, and so forth had not been subsumed under a unifying term such as “the sublime,” there would have been no discourse for the theories of Burke and Kant to build upon. (8)

Moreover, the revival of the sublime in the field of aesthetics opened up a wider range of conceptualisation. As Peter de Bolla observes, the attraction of the sublime had “considerable power over aestheticians” in the eighteenth century (38). In this sense, the naming of the sublime contributes to the establishment of aesthetics as a discipline.

In turn, the development of modern aesthetics facilitates the development and independence of the sublime. Although this centrifugal force within beauty obtained a name and promoted the rise of aesthetics, the sublime did not gain independence as a concept until

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<sup>63</sup> Peter de Bolla gives an insightful examination on the use of the term sublime in the writing of these three. See the details in De Bolla, Peter. *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics, and the Subject*. B. Blackwell, New York, NY, USA; Oxford [England];, 1989.

the second half of the eighteenth century, along with the development of aesthetics. The multitude of studies appearing on sensation required to be systematised as a discipline and these were first given the term *aesthetics* by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in 1735. Although Baumgarten's naming and definition were disputed, aesthetic studies around that time gradually gained independence from the general discussion on philosophy, psychology and literature. To become an independent discipline, study on the experience of sensation also required its own concepts, categories and critical models to work with.

Edmund Burke responded to these developments in aesthetics in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* where he posited two categories which marked the independence of the sublime as an aesthetic category different from and in opposition to, the beautiful.<sup>64</sup> Burke informed readers of his intention to distinguish the idea of beauty from that of the sublime, claiming that this was the study's chief objective (91). The *Enquiry* thus firstly provides a systematic way to conceptualise the beautiful by contrasting it to the sublime. As James Boulton remarks, the new method breaks "a tradition of orthodoxy" (xxv). De Bolla observes that the works with the concern of these two concepts before Burke are general (28). Burke's contribution to aesthetics directed the development of this discipline towards a highly specific, detailed analysis whereby it immediately acquired a recognised degree of independence.

In this sense, the theories of the beautiful and the sublime, independent but affinitive, began to develop in separate ways in line with the rise of modern aesthetics. Another key theoretical understanding of these two categories as oppositional is to be found in Kant's

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<sup>64</sup> This work was first published in 1756 and the second edition was published in 1757 with large additions, and it is the second edition that is normally considered as the source of Burke's conceptions of beauty and the sublime.



third critique, *The Critique of the Power of the Judgment*. Burke's ground-breaking work treats the beautiful and the sublime as two independent and mutual exclusive concepts and subsequent Kantian aesthetic theories established a paradigm of modern aesthetics based on the beauty-sublimity dualism, which lay the foundations for all future discussion on aesthetics as a branch of philosophy.

A detailed examination of these two concepts in both Burke and Kantian formulations can outline the boundary between them and establish the basis of my comparison between the concept of beauty in this dualistic formulation and 'new beauty'.

In the *Enquiry*, Burke formulates his distinction between the beautiful and the sublime based on the obvious duality of pleasure and pain as the fundamental origin of each experience, ascribing the sensible features of the object in opposite pairs to each experience as direct causes.

Burke establishes his separation between beauty and sublimity by dividing human feeling into pain, indifference (tranquillity), and pleasure (32-33). However, the middle term is purely functional, playing the role of a boundary maker only. It is a notional temporal gap that necessarily keeps the experiences of pain and pleasure apart. Because of this function, pain and pleasure are separated, held at each end of the scale. This means that either easing pain or reducing pleasure cannot make pain or pleasure into the opposite category but only may approach the state of indifference. In this formulation, pain and pleasure are exclusive to each other, never being mixed with or transformed into each other. After distinguishing between pain and pleasure, Burke comments that: "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of *pain*, and *danger* [emphasis added], that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*" (39). Conversely, beauty is a social quality, our experience of the objects giving

us a sense of *joy and pleasure* in beholding them. This quality helps us to make and fix our choices. This pleasure can inspire sentiments of tenderness and affection and generate the passion of love. (42-43).

Burke's separation of plain and pleasure as a binary pair of markers for the sublime and beautiful respectively, allows him to enumerate the sensible features of objects arousing sublimity listed in the second part of *Enquiry*. Because his own categorisation is to some extent overlapping and confusing, I re-organise them into six types. The first is the feature that causes mysterious feelings. In terms of Burke's observations obscurity and intermittence have this effect because spatial or temporal uncertainty induces the feeling of danger and anxiety, which is experienced as painful (58-64). Suddenness is second type of experience that produces uncertainty. Sudden change such as the quick transition from darkness to light or vice versa interferes with perception and therefore causes suspension of the work of mind. A sudden change in shape has a similar effect (83). The third is whatever invokes the feeling of greatness can be linked to the sublime. In Burke's view, these characteristics are embodied in the power in nature and the divine, in vastness in size, infinity, magnificence, weight, lightness, and loudness. These features invoke astonishment an awe-inspiring feeling that overwhelms the mind as it is occupied by the external object and thus, filled with terror (64-70; 72-77). The fourth type is named as *privation*, such as darkness, solitude, and silence: experiences which bodily and spiritually threaten human self-preservation (71-72; 84). The fifth type is any difficult experience which causes a feeling of pain (77), and the more direct painful feelings aroused through the physical body is the sixth type, such as a response to bitterness and stench (85-87).

In a similar way, Burke rests the cause of the beautiful on a number of sensible features. After distinguishing between proportion, fitness, and perfection, he points out that the object embodying the quality of beauty has a number of distinctive features in its outward

form. Opposite to the feeling of the sublime, the beautiful object is small in size, smooth in surface, with gradual variation lines in its contour, delicate or fragile in appearance, and milder and softer in colour (113-117). It is noteworthy that Burke's idea of beauty strictly rules out any strength and harshness of the object but retains all the qualities that induce feelings of tenderness and softness by emphasising relaxation and loosening and slackening of the body of the observing subject. Although his categorisation and analysis are occasionally "bizarre" and "ludicrous" and sometimes mix the feeling of beauty with that of pity as Boulton comments in his introduction to *Enquiry* (xxv), Burke's observations and descriptions of beauty were ground-breaking and subtle.

To summarise: the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, in Burke's formulation, rests on the dualism between pleasure and pain and the contrasting pair of the sensible features of objects. In this way, Burke successfully polarises the sublime and the beautiful based on their causes and representations. The sublime is caused by "tension, contraction, or violent emotion of nerves" (132). Conversely, beauty is caused by love, produced by relaxation (151). He alleges that the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is one of the "remarkable contrast" and concludes his comparison by stating that:

For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent: beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line; and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation: beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure; and, however they may vary afterwards from the direct nature of their causes, yet these causes keep up an eternal distinction between them. (124)

The dualism of the beautiful and the sublime thus is a key support for Burke's empirical philosophy.

Although it is empirical, Burke's study outlined above is significant for establishing a set of references for the comparison between the beautiful in this tradition and the 'new beauty', since he provides a valuable foundation for his successors. As Kant comments, Burke's analysis of the phenomena of the mind is "extremely fine" and provides rich materials "for the favourite researches of empirical anthropology" (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 158).

However, Kant, as Burke's near contemporary, places the beautiful and the sublime on his philosophical agenda once more, because he realises that Burke's investigation relies on subjective sensory experiences and therefore lacks universal application. Kant's conception of the beautiful and the sublime is reflective and intellectual and as such provides a more profound analysis of the distinction between the pair and lends it a new sophistication.

The theories of beauty and sublimity as part of Kantian critical philosophy respond to a wider philosophical aim of revealing the relationship the subject and the external world. Because of this Kantian inquiry is not content with empirical study but it also has a metaphysical concern. In his formulation, the beautiful and the sublime are the outcome of the dynamic between the subject and the object. Consequently, the Kantian distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is based on the relationship between the subject and the object, specifically the two contrasting ways in which the mind responds to external objects (128-130).

The beautiful object in nature for Kant carries with it purposiveness, *a priori* order of nature, in its form which satisfies the mind. The *purposiveness* of the natural object, in terms of Kant's further explanation, suggests that the object is, as it were, "designed" or

“predetermined” for the power of judgment of the subject. As he defines it in his discussion of the third moment of aesthetic judgment, beauty is “the form of the purposiveness of an object, insofar as it is perceived in it without representation of an end” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 120). In other words, the beautiful object contains a form so specifically suited for the mind that the form serves as it were to strengthen and entertain the subject’s mental power by means of its variety and unity (Kant *Critique of the Power of Judgment* 129; 233). In terms of this discussion, the object with a form of variety and unity in conformity with the subject is beautiful. Responding to this object, the mind is satisfied and the subject thus gains pleasure from this process.

Elaboration reveals four features of beauty in this respect. First, the experience of the beautiful occurs on the condition that the subject perceives the object. In this sense, the subject and the object are co-existent when the experience of the beautiful emerges. The subject cannot experience beauty without the participation of the form of the object and the object cannot be beautiful without the subject’s judgment. As Kant recaps in the “general remarks” of “The Analytic of Beauty,” the faculties of mind are bound to a determinate form of the object on the one hand while the object can provide the mind with a form on the other (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 124-125). Second, the form of the beautiful object contains its intactness within. In Kant’s words, the form “contains precisely such a composition of the manifold as the imagination would design in harmony with the lawfulness of the understanding in general” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 125). In other words, the purposiveness in the object suggests that the form of the object should conform to the faculties of mind, indicating a “dual harmony” termed by Fiona Hughes as: the inner harmony between faculties of mind on the one hand and the harmony between the object and the mind on the other (9). The inner harmony requires that the perception of the mind of the form of the object satisfies the pursuit of unity of understanding. In other words, the object

should be in complete formal accord with its unity to satisfy the “lawfulness of understanding”. In addition, the purposiveness of an object premises a designed disposition of order or proposition in the object, a priori, to ensure that the object has the ability to serve a final end other than any practical one. The latter harmony suggests the third feature which is that the relation between the subject and object must consist in peace, without conflict, because the faculties of the mind are not only capable of perceiving but also of being entertained by the object’s form. In other words, the subject is pleased. Fourthly, beauty as quality is passively displayed via the form of the object. In other words, the object is in a passive position so that it may display its form to accommodate the contemplation of the subject. Because Kant treats beauty as the quality of the form of objects (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 128), the beautiful is related to order or proportion, inherent to, and inert in, the object. Beauty is self-sufficient and pre-existent and the object is merely its container that waits for the action of the judging subject.

The relationship between subject and object in the sublime is different, however. Although the object initiates the feeling of the sublime, it is excluded by the subject in his/her experience of it. The mind undergoes disturbance, the opposite to harmony, by perceiving the object and regains pleasure by excluding the object. The mind, according to Kant, experiences two stages when the sublime occurs and each maintains a different object function. The first is the object perceived concretely by the subject in the external world. The second is the object conceived by the mind of the subject as the counterpart and reflection of the external one. The internal object only serves as a representation of sublimity.

At the first stage, the mind suffers violence, because it detects the conflict in the encounter between the subject and the external object. Normal faculties of the mind are blocked and overwhelmed by the enormity or power of the object. This experience is respectively termed as a *mathematical sublime* (131) and further, a *dynamic sublime* (143) by

Kant. Evidently, neither of these two features can satisfy the mind as the beautiful does, because their excessive dimensions lie beyond its capacity. The subject thus loses control of the object, which disturbs and threatens consciousness. As a result, displeasure or even pain arrives because the search for unity of the mind through the form of the object is impeded.

At the second stage, however, the feeling of displeasure is transformed into pleasure by a process of elevation within the mind. Between the two stages is a break, described as suspension. Suspension forces the mind to detach from the external object and to return to itself. To overcome the anxiety from threatening objects and assure self-preservation, the mind applies the faculties of imagination to conceive a controllable object and by working with reason and morality thus generates self-determination. Accordingly, self-determination produces satisfaction based on the reassurance of self-existence in this process, a satisfaction that replaces the previous sense of displeasure as the subject is now back in charge. As a result, the original object of the first stage is replaced by an imagined and controllable one at the second stage and the subject experiences transcendence within the mind

Kantian accounts of the sublime, in this sense, contour the mechanism of sublimity based on a dynamic between the subject and the object. Initially, the appearance of the external object invoking the sublime is formless. That is to say, the excess of the external object represents limitlessness and incompleteness because the object is unable to be captured by the finite subject consciousness. Secondly, in sublimity the external object is absent. Because of failing to provide a form in unity to satisfy the mind, the external object is abandoned immediately and replaced by a reconceived object. For Kant, the external object thus does not provide the direct feeling of the sublime as in the case of the beautiful, but serves only as the trigger of the mind or a signifier rather than an entity with an essential identity. Thus, the sublime object does not exist inasmuch as the sublime arises in the mind rather than residing as does the beautiful, in the perception of the object *per se*, as Kant

claims that “what is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form.” (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 129) Thirdly, the sublime suggests a disharmonious relation between the subject and the object, a competition or struggle between them. The balance between subject and object is disturbed by the conflict between the search for unity of the mind in the object in the face of the external object’s failing to provide such a form. At the first stage, the subject is threatened and overwhelmed by the excess of the external object. At the second stage, the subject defeats the object by its faculties of mind. As a consequence, the encounter with the sublime ultimately affirms the victory of the subject. The dualism between the beautiful and the sublime, as two types of aesthetic judgement, and also based on the opposition between subject and object, thus can be traced back to Kantian theory.

To repeat: Kantian pain and pleasure as source of sublimity and beauty respectively are based on the relationship between the subject and the object. Like Burke, Kant also treats pain and pleasure as the foundation of the sublime and the beautiful. Burke polarises the beautiful and the sublime in terms of the pain-pleasure binary and ascribes contrasting sensible features of objects to them. In Burke’s view, pain and pleasure are simple and basic ideas unable to be defined (32). Kant delves further than Burke into the generation of pain and pleasure. For Burke, pain and pleasure are ultimate opposites and they cannot be transformed into each other. He admits the possibility of transformation between pain and pleasure (with the help of temporality) and conceives that pain and pleasure are fundamentally rooted in the relationship between the subject and the object. According to Douglas Burnham’s commentary, pleasure in aesthetic experience is the purpose of the subject’s having achieved a sense of itself or been furthered, as it were, when it applies faculties of mind to the object. When the purpose of the subject is impeded, there is pain (89). Whereas in the judgment of the beautiful, the purpose of the subject is achieved because of the purposiveness in the object. This same purpose nevertheless is impeded in the sublime by



the contra-purposiveness in the object. Based on the distinction between pleasure and pain, Kant clarifies that the most important and intrinsic difference between the sublime and the beautiful lies in the purposiveness in natural beauty's form which satisfies the power of judgment and the contra-purposiveness of the feeling of the sublime which does violence to the subject's imagination (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 129).

Moreover, the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime lies in the different responses of the mind to the object. Kant describes two contrasting ways in which the subject responds to the object: "the mind feels itself moved in the presentation of the sublime in nature, while in the aesthetic judgment on the beautiful in nature it is in calm contemplation." (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 141) In the judgment of the beautiful the subject collaborates with the object by contemplation, while the subject competes with the object by abandoning it in the sublime. In this sense, the beautiful is based on the harmonious relation between subject and object and the sublime is based on disharmony between them.

Kant thus formulates a beautiful-sublime dualism based on the opposition between the subject and the object. Unlike the duality of pain and pleasure in Burke's theory, it is the opposition of the subject and the object that cannot be reconciled according to Kant. Philip Shaw comments that the distinction between the subject and the object is the fundamental division for Kantian philosophy which is to be not overcome but rather embraced, for it is the only basis to assert ideas of freedom and autonomy, ideas central to ethical and political life, as well as to poetry (96). Shaw's comments reveal that there is a fundamental separation between the subject's mind and the external world in Kantian philosophy which causes the duality in his aesthetics and privileges a detachment of the body from the external world.

Although Kant attempts to avoid reducing his rational analysis to Burke's empirical approach, his observations and descriptions of dualism, like Burke's, remain conspicuous in

*Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Kant criticises Burke's empiricism based on the sensible form of external objects and thus attempts to apply a more abstract way to examine the relationship between the inner human mind and the outer world of objects. This does not mean that he rejects Burke's dualist perspective. Like Burke's exercise in categorisation, the gulf between the concept of the beautiful and that of the sublime remains in Kantian theory. Pairs in opposition such as harmony/disharmony, form/formless, passiveness/activeness, gentleness/intensity, rules/chaos, are still apparent. As Boulton observes, the third critique of Kant "bears clear traces of Burke's influence" (xlvi).

One of the crucial consequences caused by this dualism is the hierarchy between beauty and sublimity. By adding a moral dimension, Kantian aesthetics privileges the power of sublimity over beauty. As Philip Shaw points out, the sublime bears upon moral questions because one of its fundamental conditions is that it ultimately rests on a quality of mind rather than nature (84). He argues that the beautiful pleases in the mere judging thereof, appealing to sensation and excluding the active participation of concepts. The sublime, however, pleases through its resistance to the interest of the senses (150). Being negative, the power of sublimity thus is the capability of *transcendence*, going beyond human sensibility and then moving the judging subject to Reason, where "the pure and unconditioned intellectual satisfaction resides" (153). According to Kant, to enjoy this satisfaction is of moral *good*. He claims:

the intellectual, intrinsically purposive (moral) good, judged aesthetically, must not be represented so much as beautiful but rather as sublime, so that it arouses more the feeling of respect (which scorns charm) than that of love and intimate affection, since human nature does not agree with that good of its own accord, but only through the dominion that reason exercises over sensibility. (153-154)

Because beauty is related to sensational satisfaction, it is immanence. In sublimity, the judging subject transcends because he/she sacrifices the self-interest of sensational pleasure for pursuing goodness. Accordingly, a hierarchy is established and fixed as the so-called *transcendental aesthetics*.

Dualistic formulation of the beautiful and the sublime thus becomes a paradigm that forms an aesthetic tradition, since the works of Burke and Kant are fundamental to the establishment of modern thinking about aesthetics which has largely inherited their concepts, terms, ideas and methods. Although theories of beauty and sublimity have varied over time, the dualism established by Burke and Kant in the eighteenth century has affected the way of thinking since then. Their successors, working with the two concepts from Romanticism to post-modernism, frequently respond to and work within this dualist framework. For example, William Wordsworth, an immediate successor and arguably the most prominent thinker and practitioner of English Romanticism, formulates his understanding of the beautiful and the sublime following the dualism founded by Burke and Kant. Wordsworth owes a direct debt to both philosophers and relates the beautiful to love and gentleness and the sublime to exaltation and awe. He claims that “the mind cannot be affected by both these sensations at the same time, for they are not only different from, but opposite to, each other” (264). In the same vein, dualism is also adopted by theorists and critics of post-modernism. For example, Jean-Francois Lyotard treats the beautiful as a means to forge consensus and to foster unity, harmony, and communicability and refers the sublime to fragmentation and disharmony (Shaw 148). In terms of Philip Shaw’s observation, what the postmodernists do is simply re-read a tradition that remains in the discourse of Longinus, Burke, and Kant when they discuss the sublime and the beautiful (7).

Moreover, this dualistic tradition has its impact on forming modern aesthetics in China, interpreting the traditional Chinese aesthetic experiences and institutionalising it with modern experience in its dualist framework.

The concept of beauty in ancient China was as inclusive as it was in the West. Originally, the concept of beauty involved both an appealing decorative form and its subsequent emotional effect. In *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition* (2009), Li Zehou gives a vivid etymological explanation of the Chinese character *mei* to illustrate this. He writes:

the original meaning of the character *mei* probably referred to a large man wearing a headdress in the shape of a ram or decorated with ram motifs. While carrying out various shamanistic rituals, he would wear the ram's head or ram's horn on his head as an expression of his mystical power and authority. (2)

Because of its ritual function, the spectators are moved by its appearance. He further points out that beauty referred both to dynamic beauty (strong beauty) and fine and delicate beauty in traditional Chinese aesthetics (59). The former is embodied in the inner moral power of the sage, in whom heaven and humanity are unified. In this sense, dynamic beauty bearing moral greatness, as Li remarks, historically and logically precedes the latter in the Chinese aesthetic tradition which based on Confucian ideology (59-60).

This traditional expansive category of beauty was immediately subsumed under the theoretical framework based on the Burke-Kantian dualistic tradition as soon as it was introduced in China. Although traditional ideas remained at work to some degree, as Li argues, they were reinterpreted from a modern foundation which emphasises the importance of individual sensuous existence (214). Influenced by the categorisation of modern aesthetics, dynamic beauty became independent and subsumed under the name of the sublime. E Xia clearly configures the importation and localisation of these modern aesthetic concepts,

especially sublimity and beauty, in modern China. As E Xia notes, the concept of sublimity was first introduced by Wang Guowei, one of the harbingers of Chinese modern aesthetics, in his translation of *The Introduction to Philosophy* (1902) from Kuwaki Genyoku, a Japanese neo-Kantian philosopher. Wang related this concept to the notion of “strong beauty” in traditional Chinese aesthetics in his translation (E 44-45). This contact with Western aesthetics originates the new independence of the concept of sublimity in the Chinese context. Wang’s influence at this point still can be seen in Li’s work, since Li relates dynamic beauty to the Kantian sublime because of its moral function. According to E Xia, the establishment of sublimity as a modern aesthetic category in China occurred in the 1920s (55-56). The resemblance between the Chinese notion of *strong beauty* and the Western sublimity does not only lie in the characteristic of grandeur but also in its moral superiority compared to the fine and delicate beauty. Moreover, the ideology of national salvation, for the notion of reverence and sacrifice, which called for a hard and devoted struggle for national freedom enhanced the moral privilege of the sublime in the context of the modern China in the first half of the twentieth century. Wang Ban elaborates the interplay between the twentieth-century political practices and the lofty ideal of independence and freedom in China in his book *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (1997) by emphasising the political function of sublimity in the revolutionary context in modern China. I briefly touched the Kantian view of the relationship between war and the sublimity here and will return to this topic later in this chapter to compare it with the significance of beauty to war-resistance in both H.D. and Chen’s formulation.

#### **4.2.2 The Concept of ‘New Beauty’ beyond the Tradition**

H.D. and Chen's 'new beauty' emerges from the domination of this dualistic modern aesthetic tradition respectively in both the Western and Chinese contexts. However, the concept of 'new beauty', as I will show, presents a conceptualisation of beauty that moves beyond this tradition.

To make a clear distinction between the concept of 'new beauty' and conventionalised beauty within this tradition, I appropriate those terms such as *beauty*, *the beautiful*, *sublimity* and *the sublime* within the traditional aesthetic discourse as my normative markers. To avoid any simplification caused by traditional dualism, the term *contra-beauty* is introduced to name the opposite of the beautiful by me. Similarly, the opposite of sublimity will be termed *contra-sublimity*.

As I show in this comparison, the notion of 'new beauty' cannot be treated simply as the beautiful, for some features of 'new beauty' fail to conform to the traditional treaties of beauty but are instead akin to its opposite. If not going as far as to negate the idea of beauty, these radically different features at least show an inclination towards contra-beauty.

The 'new beauty' as it is treated in this thesis is generated from a dynamic confrontation rather than fixed in objective forms as categorical qualities in the traditional formulation. In other words, the object described as 'new beauty' is not the object which causes not relaxation but tension and contraction. Beauty, in Burke's view, is embodied in the sensible qualities of an object. By formulating the abstract idea of purposiveness, Kant advances Burke's vision and sees the beautiful as qualities in form which can be captured by the reflection of the subject. Either concrete or abstract, beauty lies in objective form which is perceived and pleases the mind of the judging subject in the traditional formulation. In other words, an intact form is the precondition of experiencing beauty. However, the judgement of 'new beauty' first discards the form, which is the traditional source of pleasure and invites the

form that causes pain. The object of 'new beauty' is crude, neither intact as Kantian beauty requires nor smooth and soft as with Burke's description. For example, H.D.'s sea rose is isolated and broken. It is "marred and with stint of petals, / meagre flower, thin, / sparse of leaf". In Chen's "The Non-Flowering Branch", what can be seen is the lonely and defective branch without flowers. In terms of Burke-Kantian theory, these deformed objects are disturbing, suggesting not pleasure and certainly not the perfection of smoothness, but pain. As Paul Guyer observes, disfigurement is the opposite of the source of Kantian beauty, because deformity blocks potential pleasure (151). In this sense, deformed objects cannot be regarded as the source of love in Burke's view and equally violate the purposiveness of nature in terms of Kantian accounts. However, the 'new beauty' emerges from the absence of any suggestion of traditional beauty. Without the conventional qualities of beauty contained in the form, H.D. and Chen envision an alternative beauty in objects that confront a frequently destructive, external power. For example, the beauty in the broken sea rose is produced from its action against the wind and sea waves. The beauty in the branch, similarly, lies in the action of shivering. In this formulation, an object cannot be regarded as the representation of beauty unless it encounters and responds to a form of external violence. This feature thus sits in defiance of the Burke-Kantian tradition which emphasises the stable and thus perceivable quality in objects. The 'new beauty' however, diminishes the importance of the form of objects and underscores a beauty-making process. The beautiful thus changes from quality to ability; and from the stasis of a finished product to a process. The competition between the static beauty and the dynamic one is clearly embodied in the comparison between intact and wind-attacked gardens in H.D.'s "Sheltered Garden" and the presence and absence of flowers in Chen's "The Non-Flowering Branch".

Correspondingly, the object represented as instances of 'new beauty' become a stand-in for the subject with autonomous strength and power rather than existing merely for

display. In terms of the Burke-Kantian theory, beauty is derived from contemplation. This means that the beauty represented by a conventionalised beautiful object, such as flowers, is the beauty of passivity and dependence, waiting for evaluation and appreciation—even confirmation—from an outside beholder. The object of beauty is reduced to being a supplier of beautiful qualities, which either meet Burke’s long list of descriptions or form the incarnation of the Kantian *a priori*. Consequently, the objects are passive and because of that, placed in a secondary position. The judging subject of beauty thus is an external party (most likely, the human consciousness). The judgment of ‘new beauty’ that excludes exterior attractive features and potential viewers is completed by the object. The objects embodying ‘new beauty’ are located in a wild place, such as a remote seaside or a dark night, both isolated from the potential external gaze. Because the beholder of beauty functioning as the subject in traditional theories, superior to the object, is of no importance in this strange reversal explored by Chen and H.D., the object actively brings out its own unique potential of being beautiful in and for itself. The object embodying ‘new beauty’ gains an autonomy through which it can exercise a unique form of power. In H.D.’s sea flower poems, the sea rose dances with the sand and wind in “Sea Rose”; the iris can print its shadow in “Sea Iris”. In “Sea Lily”, the reed against the waves and sand is as strong as a flint against a stone. Likewise, the shivering leaves in Chen’s “The Early Morning Stroll” can cut the sky into pieces and the falling leaves in autumn make the wind sound in “The Non-Flowering Branch”. The object of beauty thus is shifted from pleasing the subject with its passive appearance to generating beautiful, not to mention, active features on its own. In this sense, the ‘new beauty’ is a type of contra-beauty because the autonomy of the object replaces passivity and power, as a distinctive feature of the sublime, is implanted in the object in a new way.



The independence and autonomy of ‘new beauty’ reveals an unexpected integration of the subject and the object of the judgment of beauty. In other words, the relationship between the beholder and the beheld is transformed. Conventionalised beauty waiting for an external gaze to appreciate and evaluate its worth suggests that beauty is formed by *reflection* (resembling the moonlight which derives from reflecting the sun). ‘New beauty’, however, is a product of *radiation*, insofar as the beauty is self-generated by dynamic confrontation, as the sun radiates light on its own. In this sense, ‘new beauty’ can be both produced and affirmed by its carriers, namely the flowers and plants *per se*, rather than an external judging subject. These flowers and plants, in this sense, are both the subjects and objects of judging the beautiful, assuming the role of both appreciators and appreciated. Thus, the flowers and plants gain autonomy and self-affirmation, because they are vehicles manifesting beauty and simultaneously confirming this manifestation. In this sense, ‘new beauty’ is not created for something external and superior but for the significance within the planes of material existence. The subject/object distinction thus collapses in the formulation of ‘new beauty’. In this sense, the ‘new beauty’ is a contra-beauty opposite to the Burke-Kantian tradition because it radically challenges the traditional treaties by presenting deformed yet strong objects. Moreover, the ‘new beauty’, contrasting with traditional theories, enlivens the object by underscoring its autonomy.

Although it is the opposite of Burke-Kantian beauty, ‘new beauty’ cannot be subsumed under the term of sublimity either, because it shows the feature of contra-sublimity: again, working against the Burke-Kantian tradition. The ‘new beauty’ is small in size and needs the presence of the object form.

This is because the small and weak object, rather than the object excessive in size or amount, is empowered and exalted. In other words, the incarnation of power is changed from the object’s excessive form to the object represented in a perceivable and apparently safe

form. The victim of overwhelming power takes over the position of exerting power, represented by the form of its physical inner strength. In terms of the Burke-Kantian tradition of the sublime, power and strength are embodied in or represented by the object in enormity of size or number or in power of strength. The power of the strong and the great is pre-given and invasive as it becomes an overwhelming force acting on others. In the context of 'new beauty' the small and weak object nevertheless obtains power and becomes strong by confronting the power of nature. The power represented in 'new beauty' takes the form of vitality. The broken shape of flowers in H.D.'s poems and the shivering of the branch in Chen's poems do not indicate decline but assure their existence as both a representation and generator of earthy vitality. The vitality manifested in the defective and lacking paradoxically indicates hope and futurity. This power is inherent in the body and therefore, sustainable. Moreover, it is now the small and weak object in 'new beauty' that is exalted for its awe-inspiring features rooted in its generative power that survives, whatever is thrown at it. In traditional theories of the sublime, exaltation based on awe-inspiring feeling is often given to a huge or strong object which is viewed as overwhelmingly superior. Mountains, sea, and storms are common elements that receive this kind of exaltation. Conversely, the small and weak in the poems of 'new beauty' receive high praise. H.D.'s rhetorical questions prevailing in her sea-flower poems strongly express the privileging of small and weak flowers and plants. Chen's comparative phrase "more beautiful" ("The Non-Flowering Branch") also shows her homage to the weak branch. As a result, violent nature, still in power yet losing favour, serves as a foil paradoxically to enhance the power of the small and weak. That is to say, the conception of 'new beauty' vests power in the small and weak object and makes it lofty thus violating the traditional definition of the sublime.

The 'new beauty' is dependent on the existence of the object. In other words, the external other remains in the judgment of 'new beauty'. Sublimity in the Burke-Kantian

tradition is a self-reflexive process in which the external object is absent. The subject, in terms of the preceding discussion, obtains its superiority by reducing the external object to a self-conceived object in the mind. In other words, the precondition of sublimity is the rejection of any objective form. In this sense, the object is not 'real' but a symbol in Kantian sublimity. However, the object finds its existence re-affirmed in the conception of 'new beauty'. Prevailing in the poems of 'new beauty' is the external object such as the flower, yet Chen and H.D. attempt to avoid placing human beings as the superior subject of aesthetic judgment. For example, H.D. provides a technique of scientific observation in depicting the sea garden. By this means, the flowers and plants are placed in a central position with autonomy because the poet actively relinquishes herself by taking a distant view.<sup>65</sup> Here, the poets do not appear to participate but they only record the confrontation as outsiders, although inevitably a poetic voice is often interwoven. The poetic voice, sometimes directly addressing the flowers and plants and sometimes addressing them as *you*, does not serve to introduce an *I*, but underscores the process of an alternative objectification of 'new beauty' by drawing attention to the object and centring it in the poem. In so doing, the poets return autonomy to the objects to preserve their forms. In this sense, these weak objects approach a form of *I* without ever being colonised by it. As a contrast with the absence of the external object in the sublime, 'new beauty' bonds to external objects. In this sense, 'new beauty' is contra-sublimity, as Scruton argues, sublime is about me whereas beauty is all about objects (9).

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<sup>65</sup> In terms of H.D.'s biography, she was likely to have received some knowledge and training of scientific observation during her childhood and adolescence as a daughter of an astronomy professor and the granddaughter of a botanist. Moreover, she was expected to be another Marie Curie and was trained as such by her father until she failed in maths (Guest 12 and 14; Friedman *Psyche Reborn* 26).

To summarise, the notion of ‘new beauty’ is a new aesthetic concept which cannot be subsumed under either beauty or sublimity within the Burke-Kantian aesthetic tradition given its features of contra-beauty and contra-sublimity.

The ‘new beauty’ does, however, retain a focus on the term *beauty* (this is discussed further in Chapter Five). With the combination of the preceding discussion in Chapter Three, the construction of the new concept can be seen as a process involving the beauty’s resignification. The ‘new beauty’ in both poets is redefined through their manipulation of images, slipping out of the Burke-Kantian tradition through negating the traditional discourse rather than establishing a separate discourse outside of it. In other words, the construction of ‘new beauty’ alters the relations between these concepts which are understood in traditional discourse, while still ironically depending on them for its force. The poetry of ‘new beauty’ breaks the link between the concepts of small and weak and that of powerless and passive and relates it to notions of power and action. This understanding, beyond the traditional dualist categorisation of the beautiful and the sublime, calls for an alternative *synthesis*.

This synthesis is not the nostalgia for pre-modern aesthetics dating back to the time of Plato or Confucius. As I have argued, the idea of beauty before the eighteenth century was quite general and often attached to moral and practical values. Without being differentiated, the beautiful and the sublime were mixed together. Beauty was the quality in both delicacy and grandeur, referring to both basic sensory pleasure and sacred pleasure. However, the conception of a ‘new beauty’ suggests that the two poets are aware of the difference between the beautiful and the sublime at least in a poetic tradition and in personal experience, if not in a strict philosophical tradition. In this sense, the image of ‘new beauty’, sophisticated and nuanced, is deliberately created to bring the beautiful and the sublime into a new synthesis.

Synthesis on the other hand, is not reconciliation. Mercedes Romon-Alonso in *H.D.: sublimity and beauty in her early work (1912-1925)* (1999) insightfully points out that the joint consideration of both beauty and sublimity is an important approach to understanding H.D.'s beauty in her early works, but she underestimates H.D.'s creativity with respect to the images of 'new beauty'. Romon-Alonso is working within the dualist categorisation of the beautiful and the sublime and seeks evidence for both in her poetry. As a consequence, Romon-Alonso inevitably arrives at a conclusion by mechanically combining the two concepts: H.D.'s poems are partly about the beautiful and also partly about the sublime and thus this phenomenon is ascribed to a purpose of reconciliation (191). Reconciliation, however, serves only to mediate the two concepts in dualism, whereas the image of 'new beauty' which is able to bear contradiction, challenges the traditional definition of the beautiful and the sublime by blurring the boundary between the two. The notion of 'new beauty' subsumes opposing features and calls for a re-examination and redefinition.

The preceding analysis reveals that 'new beauty' gives a new narrative of the relationship between an *I* and the *other*: equal and interactive. The conception of 'new beauty' emphasises equality and balance in the relationship between the two parties in a confrontation rather than ranking them hierarchically as in a binary pairing. 'New beauty' is generated from the interactions of equal, interdependent entities. Although small and weak objects are less strong and powerful, they do not submit to the violence of nature. At the same time, the power of violent nature does not subside during the confrontation, and because of this, neither of the parties needs to be annihilated. Both parties, each manifested by active and powerful images, exist in reciprocity through a constant negotiation with each other. Against the Burke-Kantian tradition the poetry of 'new beauty' appropriates the subject position for both parties and each subject welcomes the other along with its potential threats (although violent natural power may be a stronger one in physical terms it is not an overwhelming or

superior one in effect, as discussed in previous chapters). In this sense, the superior-inferior relationship designated to the parties is challenged by this new relation of equality and co-operation. This new relationship, *beauty* in H.D. and Chen's vision, thus is the path to access 'reality'.

The new relationship between an *I* and the *other* reveals two distinctive characteristics in the new definition of beauty. There is power in beauty which is demonstrated by the resistance to the violence from the other. By this power, the beautiful object can endure and extend its existence into the future. In this sense, beauty has the revolutionary power of elevation. There is also contingency involved, which means that beauty is concrete and historical, derived from each confronting occasion. In other words, beauty is in an object which is on trial (in Julia Kristeva's words *en-procès*), which means beauty is not to be had in qualities prescribed in certain forms but is generated by dynamics. In this sense, beauty is not a transcendental concept permanently linking to certain group of objects (or human beings). One thing cannot be beautiful in all conditions and through all time; everything, however, has the potential to be beautiful.

#### 4.3 A Voice in Response to Modernism: a revolution from the female-bodily experimentation

The poetry of 'new beauty' proposes an alternative way to view the world by revising the old conception of beauty formulated through the dualistic aesthetic tradition. By emphasising the dynamic and temporality, the 'new beauty' challenges a mechanical and static world view. Moreover, this new narrative of the relationship between the *I* and the *other* is from a female bodily experience and thus a female-centred response to modernism.

Modernism is the nexus of H.D. and Chen's individual poetry. Although they lived in different cultures and as writers were grounded in different poetic traditions, both poets were writing the poetry of 'new beauty' in the context of modernism. Geographically, H.D. practised at the heart of the modernist movement in London and Chen wrote these particular poems on the edges of the revolutionary storm gathering in China. If the poets' works were to be read separately and in isolation, 'new beauty' could be seen as merely the discrete poetic achievement of each poet. Although the poetry of 'new beauty' can be considered as a distinctive form of modernist innovation, at the same time it also exists, as one particular critical response to it. In this sense, to contextualise the poetry of 'new beauty', as I will show, reveals that it functions as one of the few models of modernist discourse articulating women's bodily experience.

Although the definition of modernism varies over time and in the eyes of different theorists and critics, it is widely agreed that *modernism* is a term generally characterised by a challenge to the dominant tradition. Modernism thus encompasses a fierce conflict between the old and new. H.D. and Chen's revision of the dualistic aesthetic tradition is considered as one of these new radical practices.

In *Modernism and Time: The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science, and Culture, 1880–1930* (2000), Ronald Schleifer points out that the revolutions in modernism are derived from the profound change of the perception of time, from a linear and progressive sense to a focus on the moment (1-2). He attributes this change to the rapid expansion of the material world driven by the development of economy and technology since the late nineteenth century. He writes:

the overwhelming multiplication of commodities transformed the experience of time for people living through it. Concomitant with the vast multiplication of commodities

in the last decades of the nineteenth century were vast multiplications of knowledge, enormous increases in data within the remarkable creation and professionalization of intellectual disciplines in the emerging system of research universities in the West, and the vast multiplication of populations in Europe and North America in both the relative peacefulness of Europe since the Napoleonic wars and the remarkably temperate weather patterns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (4)

These radical changes multiplied the experience of time and space for people living through it (6). As Schleifer notes, these changes caused a remarkable sense of dislocations in time and space (5). The experience in modernism thus is bound to the momentary, to a sense of temporal instability. As Ezra Pound claims in “A Few Don’ts by An Imagiste” (1913), an image is “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (200). In this way, Pound asks poets to make an effort to find the exact word to register their perception of a momentary sense (206).

Temporality and abundance had two critical consequences related to tradition. On the one hand, the new experiences called knowledge anchored in traditions into question. In other words, the existing system of knowledge was unable to accommodate the new experiences. Accordingly, new theories emerged to respond to this crisis, as Schleifer observes that all the strategies of the understanding of modernism influenced by the explosion of commodities and information, such as Jakobson’s levels of linguistic understanding and Freudian theories, are constructed in relation to the changing conceptions of time (49). On the other hand, the multiplicity of individual experiences, as Schleifer also suggests, undermines the universality and the corresponding hierarchical implications in the shared understandings and knowledge prescribed by traditions (3-4). As a result, the autonomy of experience and knowledge are returned to individuals so that individual perception became the source and arbiter of knowledge. In this sense, the regulation of transcendental ideas relinquished themselves to



accounts of concrete individual experience in time through which new forms of knowledge could be acquired. This paradigmatic shift is exemplified by Virginia Woolf's concepts of a "moment of being" and "non-being" (*Moments of Being* 70-71). According to her conception, the moment that she consciously experienced suggests her self-existence. Otherwise and elsewhere, she lives as *non-being*. Existence, thus, is momentary. This temporal sense of being had an influence on her fiction, which consists of momentary fragments, and stands as quite distinctive from her predecessors in the nineteenth century. Schleifer terms this 'new' way of understanding in modernism a form of "temporal subjectivity" (9). He explains:

the subject of experience is temporalized: the temporal situation of the subject of experience situated within the contours of his or her own life and within the "events" of history more generally conceived is a constituent element in the nature of that experience. (9)

The concrete and the historical are thereby restored to a previously abstracted perceiving and knowing subject. In this way, modernism entails a greater sense of democracy where individual experience is acknowledged and accepted to further the "wider" pursuit of knowledge. In other words, the individual and their experience is potentially legitimated to allow for what will become a series of atomised articulations of the world.

The aesthetic response to these radical changes of experiences is centred on the experiments with form. As Paul Poplawski remarks in the *Encyclopaedia of Literary Modernism*:

The most prominent and constant element in definitions of modernism is modernism's avant-garde experimentalism and its concern for radical innovation in artistic form, style, content, and method. This emphasis, in turn, is linked to what is often seen as the revolutionary dynamic within modernism. (ix)

Thus, modernism in literature and the arts consists of two fundamental aspects: one is to comprehensively rebel against the conventionalised and therefore stagnated aesthetic in the arts; the other is to self-consciously establish new flexible structures that would more faithfully represent perception at the present. This definition of modernism suggests that modernists chose to propose a solution to the uncertainty of the world by means of innovative forms such as Pound's Imagist experiment on poetry and Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique in fiction.

Modernism in China, first imported as an idea and soon incorporated in the campaign of social revolution, shares the same spirit with the Western model. At the turn of the twentieth century Chinese society also underwent an ideological shift in line with modernisation, from a traditional agricultural society to an industrial society.<sup>66</sup> However, the transition in China is more complicated and more radical.

Due to the so-called *unequal treaties* signed with the Western countries as the consequence of its military failures, China was forced to join the global market and gradually become involved with the process of globalisation. The emergence of national capitalism was the outcome of the internal changes of Chinese social and economic conditions compounded by their forced open market to the West. Commodities, native and imported alike, rapidly changed the traditional agricultural economy and people's lives. Modern ideas and thoughts that had developed over generations in the Western world, from Renaissance to modernism, poured into Chinese intellectual circles of the time. The scholar David Der-Wei Wang

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<sup>66</sup> In "Chinese Literature from 1841 to 1937" (2010), David Der-Wei Wang introduces three important moments in the modernization in China in regarding to the evolution of literature. The first one is the end of the First Opium War (1840–1842), the second is the end of the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the third is the May Fourth Movement, a nationwide cultural and political campaign begun on May 4, 1919 that called for self-rejuvenation in response to China's setbacks in post-World War I international politics (413-467). However, my study follows the periodization suggested in *Different Worlds of Discourse*, seeing the modernisation in China from the end of the first Sino-Japanese War, when the modern industry and the systematic importation of the Western modern technology and thoughts originated.

remarks “social changes ran the gamut from technological and commercial advancement to epistemological renovation” (413). This *abundance* with the sudden presence of the unfolding world profoundly changed Chinese intellectuals’ perception of time and space.

Although the modernisation of Chinese society began about 1895, the revolution of aesthetics occurred about two decades later, marked by the inauguration of New Culture Movement (*Xin Wenhua Yundong*) in 1916.<sup>67</sup> This aesthetic and literary revolution Shared the same purpose with the economic and politic revolutions and inevitably linked itself to the discourse of national salvation, for the Chinese cultural forerunners believed that empowering their less developed nation required not only modern industry and a modern political system but also a “modern mind”: the Western system of knowledge and even, its lifestyle. In the general preface to the *Compendium of China’s New Literature* (*Zhongguo Xin wenxue Daxi*) (1935), Cai Yuanpei, one of the key figures of this movement, compared the New Culture Movement with the European Renaissance and pointed out that there was more-than-a-three-hundred-year gap between China and the West. He thus claimed: “We have to work extremely hard in decades to catch up with the centuries of progress in Europe,” because “our history and the modern condition urge us to stride and rush forward.” (11)

Compared to its so-called advanced Western counterpart, Chinese tradition was criticised and challenged as corrupt and outdated. This rebellion can be seen in two editorials of the journal *New Youth* (*Xin Qinnian*),<sup>68</sup> which is considered to be the headquarter of the New Culture Movement. In “The Manifesto of Xin Qingnian” (“Ben Zhi Xuanyan”) (1919), Chen Duxiu, the editor and also its founder, announced:

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<sup>67</sup> It is also known as New Literature Movement (*Xin Wenxue Yundong*). According to the literary historian Xie Mian, it began around 1916 and continued until the eve of the “War of Resistance”. See the details in Xie Mian’s *Ideological Transformation of 20th Century Chinese Literature* (2015). p. 2

<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, this title, which replaced the original “The magazine of the Youth” in 1916, corresponds what H.D. called the generation of herself as *La Jeunesse* in her review of Responsibilities in 1916.

To seek social progress, we must challenge the preconception that the tradition or custom is always right. We are determined to forsake this old belief on the one hand and on the other create new ideas for politics, morality, and economy ourselves, based on the thoughts and ideas of previous and contemporary prominent intellectuals. We strive to establish a new spirit of the age and adapt to new social environment.<sup>69</sup>

In the earlier “A Defense of Xin qingnian” (“Ben Zhi Zuian Zhi Dabian Shu”) (1919), Chen Duxiu defined what the tradition and custom was and showed a more radical attitude:

What they accuse us was nothing more than damaging Confucianism, rites and disciplines, the essence of the Chinese culture, chastity, traditional ethics (loyalty, filial piety, and integrity), old art (Chinese drama), religion (beliefs in ghosts and gods), old literature, and old politics (the privileged class and the rule of man). As a matter of fact, we agree with all these accusations. However, we are not guilty if the cause for subverting all these is to be examined. We committed these “crimes” because we support Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science. If we have to advocate democracy, we have to undermine Confucianism, rites and disciplines, chastity, old ethics, and old politics; if we have to advocate science, we have to reject the essence of Chinese literature and old literature. (qtd. in Xie, 32-33)<sup>70</sup>

These quotations suggest the determinations of these Chinese revolutionary forerunners and the fierce dispute between radicals and conservatives.

With respect to literature, this revolution largely follows two threads. One is the revolution of literary form, replacing the traditional style with vernacular language. In 1917,

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<sup>69</sup> This editorial is in *New Youth* vol.7, No. 1, 1919. The English translation here is revised from Xie Mian’s *Ideological Transformation of 20th Century Chinese Literature* by me.

<sup>70</sup> See the original Chinese text in Chen, Duxiu. “A Defense of Xin qingnian”, *New Youth*, vol. 6, No. 1, 1919. p. 10-11.

Hu Shi's publication of "A Proposal for Reforming Literature" ("Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi") in *New Youth* inaugurated this formalist revolution. The most radical change took place in poetry. Inspired by Ezra Pound's Imagist principles and practice, Hu began to promote free verse in China, elucidating his conception of *new poetry* in "On New Poetry". He writes:

Formal restrictions limit the free development of the spirit and constrain the full expression of good content. If we yearn for new content and a new spirit, we must break away from the manacles that chain our spirit. Therefore, the recent new poetry movement in China is an emancipation of poetic form. (295)

To promote this revolution, he also published a volume of new poetry titled *The Experiment* (1920) to set an example. The other thread of the aesthetic revolution involved advocating the spirit of humanism. Zhou Zuoren borrowed from the Western idea of individualism and proposed an idea of *human literature* and wrote an essay of the same title which was published in *New Youth* in 1918. In this essay, he emphasises that new literature is a type of literature concerning both body and soul (195). At this point, both Hu and Zhou's ground-breaking essays prepared the form and content for a new literature in China.

During 1930s and 1940s, modernist literature in China, inspired by Western modernist practice, began to take shape. Following these two threads, assorted ideas were tested to serve the purpose of fostering the "modern mind", from enlightenment to Romanticism.<sup>71</sup> In 1932, Shi Zhezun and other friends founded the literary magazine *Les Contemporains* (*Xiandai*), which published translations of symbolists, imagists, and modernists such as Mallarmé, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. As David Wang observes, *Les Contemporains* was the main forum for Chinese avant-garde works. The

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<sup>71</sup> The poetic practice from the late 1910s to the time before Chen Jingrong is elucidated by Meng Liansu. See Meng, Liansu. *The Inferno Tango: Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917–1980*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2010. Page 126.

Beijing literary circle, as Wang notes, was deeply influenced by Anglo-English culture (527). Moreover, literary modernism in China, as the studies of Carolyn FitzGerald and Long Quanming suggest, was maturing during the War of Resistance and achieved a new height in mid-1940s.<sup>72</sup> Xie Mian notes the similarity between modernism in the Western world and in China:

[The intellectuals and writers] were caught in a sense of existential anxiety and absurdity; hence they no longer pursued a realist approach to portray social life and human relationships. This was the context for the similarity between China's modernist literature and its Western counterpart. (114)

Chinese modernists, deeply influenced by Western modernists and their ideas, also aimed to search for a new form of language to accommodate the experience outside of traditional symbolism and thus to grasp the bewildering, changing world.

H.D. and Chen both lived and wrote in this context of modernism, and each proposed a body-based poetics in the attempt to represent the individually perceived 'reality'. Inevitably, both women encountered the problem of self-expression in the context of modernism, no matter how revolutionary, and that there still existed limits to representation was indisputable. Concepts defined and prescribed in language might be challenged with the help of a new aesthetic, however, both poets discovered that language with static meanings did not meet the demand of the rapid change experienced in their perception and feelings.

In an attempt to understand these limits, H.D. extended Plato's body-mind dualism, formulating three states of manifestation of life in her poetics: body, mind, and over-mind (17). Body is the foundation that supports the other two states. H.D. noticed the problem of

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<sup>72</sup> See the details in Carolyn FitzGerald's *Fragmenting Modernisms: Chinese Wartime Literature, Art, and Film, 1937-49* (2014) and Long Quanming's "The Adjustment and Transformation of Chinese Modernist Poetry in 1940s" ("Zhongguo Xiandai zhuyi Shige zai Sishi Niandai de Tiaozheng yu Zhuanhua") (2002).

sign-meaning fixation in concepts and therefore posited a third state as *over-mind*. Concepts reside in the *mind* state according to the Platonic formulation, where the fixed link between the sign and meaning is maintained (“Notes on Thought and Vision” 17). The “over-mind” is formulated to accommodate the excess of meaning beyond the prescribed concept in language. H.D. claims that seeing things in the state of “over-mind” resembles seeing in water, where we need to make physical effort to readjust and refocus on the ordinary things to see the ‘reality’ (18). Romon-Alonso interprets H.D.’s formulation as bringing meaning and concepts “to the right focus via the right expression” (95).

Less systematic, Chen’s doubts about traditional representation in poetry are scattered throughout her critical essays. She argued:

The individual’s consideration should not detach from the time which he/she lives in. However, to leave poetry to the superficial topics of the contemporary situation and politics in general will limit the development of modern poetry. (“Discussing Poetry with Fang Jing” 32-33)

What Chen disagreed with in the quotation above refers to a simple treatment of the representation of politics and social issues in poetry, such as the use of political terms, slogan-style language or advertising speech. In other words, she implied that poetic language cannot be transparent or function in the way that, for instance, an ideological message may do. She underscores the complexity of modernism and modernity and claims that simple representation is not sufficient to embody the complexity of modernity, which echoes Jakobson’s theory of poetic language. She criticised modern Chinese poetry for lagging far behind the trend of modernism in the Western world and called for a new experimental way to meet the demand of expressing a profoundly changed world (“The Genuine Voice” 27-31).

Accordingly, H.D. and Chen both believed that the concepts in the existing system of language at their disposal were inadequate to write their own experience.

Their poetics as well as their praxis, attached significance to the bodily experience in creativity. H.D. stated that the spirit cannot grow by the strength and power of intellect. The physical must precede as a bedrock for the spirit or “over-mind” (“Notes on Thought and vision” 52). Further, she pointed out the peculiarity of the female body, positing the idea of “thinking with the womb” and “feeling with the brain” to distinguish the different epistemological functions between a female body and the existing knowledge system. H.D. dismissed the central position of concepts and reason in grasping knowledge by equating bodily experience to this intellectual process. Either way, by attempting to include the play of emotions on mind and body the interaction between the body and the intellect is emphasised to the point where she can suggest that the conscious mind (or consciousness) may not be entirely centred in either the brain or in the womb (20). Friedman borrows the term “spiritual realism” from Joseph Riddle to address H.D.’s bodily poetic pursuit (Friedman “Who Buried H.D.” 802). Chen also emphasises the importance of body and the individual bodily experience in modernist poetry. She contended that modernist poetry focused on profound and concrete feelings appealing to bodily sense and the interaction between the external and internal (“The Genuine Voice” 27-31). For example, she inscribes her perplexed and puzzled feelings regarding the images of shivering branch and burning flame in “The Non-Flowering Branch”, asserting that concrete reality yielded beauty in poetry (“Discussing Poetry with Fang Jing” 32-33). Concrete reality refers to the experience derived from sensory sensations in daily life. In an essay “Life—Your Mirror” (“Shenghuo—Nide Jingzi”) she urges young people to “saturate [themselves] in life, to hear, to see, to feel” (651). In another essay “Inspiration” (“Linggan”), she denies the existence of a prior inspiration governing writing and claims that poetry lies in hearing and seeing the everyday (703). In this respect, Chen’s



poetics echoes H.D.'s "spiritual realism" where it is the human body rather than concepts that provides the source of poetry and, in turn, the poetry that constructs bodily experience and reflects the understanding of the body and its situatedness.

*Spiritual realism* is realised by estranging practice in the poetry of 'new beauty'. The two poets adopted a new, estranging way to appropriate language that would construct their own experience through sensation: thus giving new meanings of language contextually by disturbing and violating its communal understanding. The images in the poetry of 'new beauty' thus suggest that the pre-given meaning of concepts, such as weakness and beauty, is subjected to revolution in order to reorganise their bodily experience. This process can be seen in Chen's "The Early Morning Stroll", in which the blue sky is cut into pieces by shivering leaves and then reshaped into a new pattern hanging from the roof corner. In this sense, the prescribed meaning thus becomes secondary to bodily experience. In other words, individual experiences can be inscribed in language through an experimental form, revealing that a new relationship between body and the external world is established. This new relationship is H.D.'s *spiritual realism*, the knowledge of 'reality' based on their bodily experience.

The new 'reality' perceived by the poets is not an abstract entity but a response to the historical, concrete and fragmented experience in their own time. Poetic estrangement renders a sense of temporality, revealing and structuring the poets' fractured experience of time. The estrangement of language changes the original meaning of images to a range of meanings based on concrete bodily experience, reflecting a real living time.<sup>73</sup> Each poem reflects its own momentary 'reality' in its orchestrated form, consonant with each temporary but concrete bodily experience. Bodily engagement with the world that subverts transcendent

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<sup>73</sup> In *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature*, Robinson subtly outlines the influence of Henri Bergson's philosophy on the feeling of time on Shklovsky in formulating his theory of estrangement (81).

concepts suggests a focus on the so-called “present”, which the poets believed was the way to respond to and deal with the rapid, bewildering changes of their situations. Furthermore, this reality arises from women’s bodily experience. The inflection and alteration of language effected by the ‘new beauty’ is legitimated and newly valued to register women’s bodily experience in poetry in an adequate manner. Through the engagement of body, the gendered ‘reality’ experienced through the body is interwoven into poetry.

The ‘reality’ is represented by the concept of ‘new beauty’. From the poetry of ‘new beauty’, we can see beauty in moment and beauty in power. The new definition is derived from the weak reclaiming power in a dynamic relation to the strong. This is ‘reality’ perceived by these two poets in the wartime from their female-centred perspective. In this sense, the poetry of ‘new beauty’, reflecting temporary and female-centred ‘reality’ is a modernist poetic practice. In other words, these two poets revise the dualistic aesthetic tradition in a modernist manner from a female-centred stance by transforming the representation of beauty. In this sense, these two women poets subvert the dualistic aesthetic tradition and propose a female-centred aesthetics through new forms of representation as the means to know and reorganise the world during the war.

What they see during the war is the political power of beauty rather than sublimity to rescue the world from destruction. Kant sees sublimity in war. He contends that “[even]war, if it is conducted with order and reverence for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and at the same time makes the mentality of the people who conduct it in this way all more the sublime, the more danger it has been exposed to and before which it has been able to assert its courage” (*Critique of the Power of Judgement* 146). However, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, the courage and persistence in confrontation is associated with beauty in H.D. and Chen’s aesthetics. The discursive significance of the revision of the Burke-Kantian beauty reveals a gender politics in narrating the war experience.

*Revision* is a process revealing the negotiation between two types of voices, the individual voice and the conventionalised voice of tradition. An outcome of intertextuality, is that revision reforms tradition, rather than abandoning it. The theories of intertextuality suggest that no work stands alone but is inter-linked with the tradition that came before it and the context in which it is produced. In this sense, revision is a way of creativity generated in relation to the tradition. Harold Bloom defines the act of revision as the “creative correction” by an individual to the achievement of his predecessors. He elaborates how the revisionary movement “follows received doctrine along to a certain point, and then deviates, insisting that a wrong direction was taken at just that point, and no other” (Bloom 29). Adrienne Rich defines revision as the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction (18-30). Kristeva, from a semiotic perspective, formulates two sign systems in accounting for the term intertextuality. Intertextuality is understood as “the passage from one sign system to another” which involves “an altering of the thetic position—the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one” (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 59). As the critic Graham Allen points out, the importance of intertextuality in Kristeva’s view is that the text does not use the previous text units as sources but transforms them and subsumes them under a new sign system, namely through the process of *Aufheben* (sublation) (52). In terms of these definitions, both the traditional values and meanings constructed in an existing sign system and those of the individual embodied in the new sign system are thus simultaneously presented in an act of revising. Revision, bearing the trace of both old and new together, thus reflects the intensity of the relationship between the individual and tradition and witnesses the seesaw battle between them.

To elaborate the difference in the relationship between the individual and tradition from different gender positions, I interrogate T. S. Eliot and Harold Bloom’s insights on this question.

Both T.S. Eliot and Bloom as talented and influential critics have made acute observations on the relationship between individual poets and the poetic tradition. T. S. Eliot emphasises the power and importance of the poetic tradition over individual poets in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1921). He claims: "[n]o poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists." (37) Although collaborating with the tradition, the individual, in Eliot's view, submits to the tradition to pay homage to it. He further asserts that the personality of individual poets should be eliminated in poetry so that poetic tradition is preserved and extended. Conversely Harold Bloom reinterprets the relationship between poetic tradition and individual poets in a deconstructive way in *The Anxiety of Influence*. In Bloom's formulation, individual poets subvert the poetic tradition. Bloom's theory is based on the Freudian family romance. Bloom argues that the work of past poets, like a father in a family, gains its authority through the priority of the past over the present (13). Poetic tradition constituted by the works of past poets thus inevitably influences the writing of individual poets in the present. Individual poets, subject to cultural belatedness and the fear of ceasing to create because of this *a priori*, pursue the possibility of originality by means of wilfully misinterpreting the works of their predecessors. This misinterpretation, termed *misprision* by Bloom, revises the poetic tradition aiming to challenge the authority of predecessors so as to gain their own form of privilege and thus to establish poetic autonomy. The intensity of the dynamics between individual poets and the poetic tradition is either revealed by the individual's submission to, or a subversion of, tradition.

However, these two ostensibly contrasting theories both claim the privilege of tradition over individuals. Both the submissive theory of Eliot and the subversive theory of Bloom defend tradition by extolling its ultimate victory. Both theories formulate captive individual poets as submitting to the poetic tradition. As outlined above, Eliot explicitly

claims this point of view in his essay. Unlike Eliot's more straightforward approach, Bloom hides his defence of tradition behind its apparent violation; however, the importance of priority in Bloom's theory clearly suggests the hierarchy in the poetic realm defined by tradition. The ensuing misinterpretation, based on antithesis, ironically eliminates the individuality of the poet when the latter strives to take precedence in the poetic tradition by repeating the practice of the predecessors yet in aberrant form. Graham Allen reveals this discrepancy in Bloom's theory, remarking:

Reading Bloom's work one cannot help but come to the conclusion that the theory of misreading is actually a defence against the plurality [...] and the accompanying recognition that literature does not exist in a hermetically sealed universe. (137)

The ostensible violation embodied in the antithetical meaning thus completes, rather than objects to, the voices of past poets. In this sense, revision as a means to overcome the anxiety of influence in Bloom's conception does not mean to subvert but conforms to the operating rules of tradition. Tradition in this context, neither a specific entity nor a sum of all the works of predecessors, represents a spirit of hierarchy or order. In other words, what the later-comers challenge is not the tradition constituted by past poets but the authority of this tradition. To privilege tradition thus exclusively celebrates elitism and authority. In this sense, individual poets, with the fear of not being accepted by the tradition, affirm rather than challenge it, because they are anxious to find a place within the tradition to affirm their poetic identity. As a consequence, the poet aims not to subvert tradition but to be a part of it through revising it. In this sense, the practice of a poet is a form of repetition of tradition. The tradition in both theories thus is an enclosed chain, an on-going cycle, one that underpins and sustains elitism and male privilege.

The relationship of women poets as individuals to the poetic tradition is more complicated than that of male poets. When women poets strive to overcome the fear of ceasing to be a poet, they encounter a questionable tradition that fails to represent them. They attempt to find their places in this tradition, but there is none. The poetic tradition is in principle shared by both sexes but it neglects, if not entirely excludes, the active participation of women.<sup>74</sup> Women do not belong to this tradition and their experiences cannot be represented within it. In this situation, women poets experience the anxiety of influence on their poetic both diachronically and synchronically, from the authority of past male poets (a temporal priority) to the authority of male contemporaries (reflecting a priority of gender). Women poets' fear of ceasing to be a poet thus is not a problem of fitting in an existing poetic tradition, but a problem of challenging the definition of the poetic tradition from the outside. For this reason, the aim of Bloom's revision, seizing the authority from a temporal priority, is still not sufficient for women poets.<sup>75</sup>

Revising the tradition thus becomes their means to challenge not only past poets but the whole existing tradition, a sealed hierarchical cycle privileging male values. Gilbert and Gubar observe that women had very limited options in the patriarchal literary tradition (64-71). Normally, there were two forms of resistance for them to use in their writing. One was to write in a so-called lesser genre with self-denial, and the other form of resistance was to mimic male writing by giving up their identities as women. Both ways of writing, however, conceal their voices. In the former situation, women did not speak for themselves; in the latter, they spoke in a fake voice. Gilbert and Gubar thus argue that revising the male-

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<sup>74</sup> For example, Graham Allen elaborates this argument in *Intertextuality*. He points out that male critics such as Harold Bloom conceive a singular male dominating poetic tradition as the cause of the anxiety of influence and remarks that such monologic descriptions of the literary "canon evade the fact that women writers have traditionally been excluded from it" (141).

<sup>75</sup> Graham Allen gives an example of the interpretation of the revision in the poem "Sonnets from the Portuguese" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and contends that the Bloomian theory is inadequate in this case. See the details in his book *Intertextuality* (148-149).

dominated tradition consisting of male genres, may be a third choice for women writers, and provide the strategy to deal with female experience from a female perspective.

The above contrast between male and female poets reveals how crucial gender difference is when it comes to the aim of revising poetic tradition. By means of revising tradition, male poets aim to dominate it through transformation; however, women poets revise the tradition in the search of an opportunity to communicate with it.

In this sense, being outsiders, women poets who revise the existing tradition by establishing an equal dialogue between the individual and the tradition to some extent avoid being easily assimilated to it. Their heterogeneity or exteriority ensures a different conversation between themselves and the poetic tradition. Accordingly, the voices of women poets and the voice of tradition co-exist here. Unlike the combative gesture of male poets who aim to claim priority over tradition, women poets call for equal participation in poetry by means of revision. The dynamic between conformity and subversion suggests the ambivalence (agreement/disagreement) between the experience of women poets and that defined by the existing tradition. By means of revision and dialogue women poets thus construct their own values and meanings in poetry. This revision, from the outside of the existing tradition, tends to provide an equal relationship between the individual and tradition. In this respect, the act of revision neither privileges any woman poet nor seizes the legitimating authority of tradition, as Bloom's suggests, but functions to undo the hierarchy in the poetic realm through equal dialogue. Women poets' revising of the existing tradition breaks down the existing male-dominated tradition into plurality and thus marks the existence of and places for women poets in the realm of poetry through the dialogue between the tradition and them. Rich calls this "an act of survival", a strategy for women to configure and confirm their existence in language (18).

Women's rebellion in poetry does not start from modernism. As Gilbert and Gubar observe, some of the women poets in the nineteenth century who confronted the dominating English literary tradition show their women's rebellion by revising the syntax and poetic convention, as their widely-quoted claim (invoking Emily Dickinson's poem) that "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant-" (73).

However, H.D. and Chen's modernist practice of 'new beauty' is more radical, because they attempt to redefine the entire vocabulary of the aesthetic tradition. By means of empowering the small and weak, the two poets call for their autonomy and equal participation in speaking publicly. Grounded on the alternative values and meanings fashioned, they thus challenge the tradition which up until then restricted the beautiful to being merely powerless and passive. Therefore, the poetry of 'new beauty', the poetic discourse of H.D. and Chen, provides the heterogeneous imagination and experience that will confront and differ from the existing male-dominated poetic tradition.

In this sense, the revision of the dualistic tradition by the proposition of 'new beauty' is not an evolution within the aesthetic tradition, but a reorganisation of the tradition to present a heterogeneous aesthetics from the perspective of gender.

In this chapter I have demonstrated the poetry of 'new beauty' as a discourse of beauty that aims to present a new explanation of the relationship between human beings and the material world from a female-centred perspective. This is a solution to the chaos of the wartime society proposed by H.D. and Chen. These two poets' poetic innovation revises the dualistic aesthetic tradition by redefining its vocabulary. This revision is a modernist practice, reflecting the perception of a radically changing world in general and women's growing self-awareness and subjectivity in particular. The conflict between the old and the new is caused not only by the need for an internal adjustment of order within the tradition, but also the



calling for a new order from the poetic outsider. The latter suggests a deep underlying gender conflict involved in the negotiation of 'new beauty' with the aesthetic tradition. It is this that I unravel in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five: The Different Narrative of Women's Lives: The Poetry of 'New Beauty' as A Mode of Feminist Discourse

The previous chapter reveals a female-centred aesthetics established in the context of modernism, responding to the sense of rapidity, temporality, fragmentation, and chaos. This chapter begins with the observation that this innovation has been buried in literary history by the dominating critical discourse of modernism. This marginalisation of the poetry of 'new beauty', as well as other poems written during both poets' early stages, shows a domination of a masculinist discourse based on a masculinity/femininity duality in a society that attempts to maintain the gender hierarchy in what would appear to have been a patriarchal society. As I explained at the beginning of this inquiry, the control of the female body in patriarchy had an effect on H.D. and Chen's writing. I show now that the 'reality' of women's experience is concealed because the female body is narrated arbitrarily by a masculinist discourse. I reveal how the poetry of 'new beauty,' as an autonomous poetic practice, subverts this social structure by announcing women's freedom. Against the masculinity/femininity duality, female-centred aesthetics, as I show in this chapter, forms a feminist discourse with *double subjects* (two equal parties challenging the subject-object dualism) to empower and thus redefine women, by relating the empowerment of beauty to *women's transcendence*. The construction of women's subjectivity by reclamation of (and in the process, redefining) their agency of transcendence, the poetry of 'new beauty' presents a mode of feminist discourse, beyond an aesthetics, which is a response to the emergence of the New Woman in modernism.

### 5.1 The Label of Escaping: a question of the critical discourse

The revolution of representation in poetry derived from a body-based poetics inscribes a female-centred 'reality' in the poetry of 'new beauty'. By this means, the 'reality' is represented by the imagery of uncultivated nature in the 'new beauty' poetry. I argue that the poetry of 'new beauty', among other poems written by H.D. and Chen, has been misread within the dominant critical discourse of modernism, as H.D. and Chen attempting to escape reality. This misinterpretation is caused by a gender bias in the critical discourse, within which this new 'reality' becomes beyond comprehension.

By focusing on imagery from uncultivated nature, H.D. and Chen's poetry had been criticised for lacking the so-called seriousness which contains historical and realistic consideration. Because the poets were accused of ignoring the urgent problems in their era, these 'new beauty' poems were labelled as escapist, a label that clouded their reputation and subsequent recognition for decades.

H.D.'s poetry received such criticism because the images in her poetry were either classical (preferably Greek) or belonged to some timeless, placeless aspect of nature. Critics labelling H.D. as "escapist" took her poetry as a retreat from the real life, since the images and the subject-matter of these poems are distant from the rapid social changes of her time, especially following the outbreak of war. These poems thus were treated as a failure to respond to the reality of the era. One example of this form of criticism comes from Harriet Monroe, one of H.D.'s editors and contemporary critics. H.D. recalled Monroe's comments and her own reaction to them in one of her letters written to her friend Norman Holmes Pearson in 1937. Monroe commented: "H.D. would do so well, ... maybe, finally [sic], ... if she could get into 'life,' into the rhythm of our time, in touch with events, and so on and so

on and so on..." (9). But H.D. took Monroe's comments as "staggeringly inept solicitude" (9). H.D.'s anger was not intended only at Monroe's criticism; she targeted all those who had seen this attitude in her poetry as a limitation. Despite the fact that H.D. continued to feature aspects of nature in her work, other critics at a later date such as Douglas Bush, Tomas Swann and Linda Wagner, also viewed H.D.'s interest in mythology as an occult way to escape from real life.<sup>76</sup>

Chen's poetry of 'new beauty' encountered similar criticism which attacked its apparent divorce from the political context. As a form of modernist writing, her poetry inevitably received the derogatory criticism levelled at modernism in a Chinese social context, which accused modernist poetry as being colonial, narcissistic and decadent through the influence of Western modernism (Lupke 14-16). In the dominant discourse of national salvation and the communist left movement, Chen's poetry, with its experimental form and natural imagery, was accused of lacking seriousness and being indifferent to nationalist politics and social issues. In the debate of whether one was being people's poets or intellectual poets, Chen's modernist practice was marginalised due to the hegemony of communist discourse, because it was accused of failing to write "people's words" and reflect "people's lives" under oppression.<sup>77</sup> Her experimental poetic was related to an example of petty bourgeois taste in this revolutionary climate, accused of being "groan and moan". One of the leftist critics claims:

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<sup>76</sup> Wagner's article, "Helen in Egypt: A Culmination," is in *Contemporary Literature*, X (Autumn 1969), pp. 523-36. Swann, Thomas B. *The Classical World of H.D.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962. Bush, Douglas. *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry*: Norton. 1937.

<sup>77</sup> Meng Liansu explicates this literary critical environment dominated by leftists based on the research of You Youji, a Chinese scholar of the "Nine-Leaves" school. Meng writes that by the time the War of Resistance was over, the poetic field, even in Nationalist-controlled areas such as Shanghai, was dominated by "People's Poetry," advocating revolutionary realism and optimism, catering to the taste of the mass (126). See the details in Meng's dissertation: "The Inferno Tango: Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917-1980".

Chen Jingrong has a fetish for his [sic] sores and defends not only Baudelaire but also himself [sic]... To bring/take it further, he [sic] aims to defend the last cultural fortress of the decadent bourgeois. (qtd, in Zhao 8)

Criticism came not only from politically hostile critics but also from her friends and colleagues. Tang Shi, one of the Nine-Leaves poets, confided that he disliked some of Chen's poems because they failed to convey a sense of revolutionary optimism. He criticised the fact that these poems lacked seriousness since they were self-centred and were devoid of the historical perspective (a belief in the victory of revolution) ("The Serious Stars" 7-26). In this political context, reality was defined by revolutionary realism and Chen's poetry thus was judged as a heresy with the poet running away from real life.

A new generation of critics, many of them feminist, have unearthed their works and called for their reassessment. For H.D., this issue has been brought to light since the 1970s by Susan Friedman's ground-breaking essay on H.D. "Who Buried H.D.?" Although from textual and biographical perspectives much of H.D.'s writing appears distant, in that her writing has many allusions to Greek mythology and also imagery from uncultivated nature, more recent scholars have argued that it is through these that H.D. addresses contemporary life. This thesis exemplifies some of them in the ensuing discussion. In Chen's case, her literary reputation has been defended since the 1980s against the background of a cultural renaissance with the revival of modernism in China. Were they in fact outsiders of their era or it is more a matter of a critical discourse that has misinterpreted them? But is nature in the 'new beauty' only a transcendent sign which detaches itself from human society and human history? Is the flower only about flowers and the wind, wind? And did the two poets really live in an "ivory tower" which is isolated from reality as H.D. described to Pearson in the letter written in 1937? Beyond a discussion on aesthetics and literary criticism, this thesis

attacks this issue from a discursive perspective with a focus on the cause of the misreading of the two poets.

Arguably, H.D.'s and Chen's social responsibilities and response to the pulse of their time are evident in the discussion of the previous chapter. The impressions of war carefully and subtly recorded in the two poets' prose writing and the poetry of 'new beauty' reveals that they did, in fact, experience and respond to the chaos and crisis of the war period. They did not retreat from it but as witnesses to the sudden change, lamented the end of the previous flourishing literary period and searched for a new way of writing poetry as a weapon to defend their idealistic vision of the world. The poetry of 'new beauty' functions as an experimental practice that explores a new way to translate faithfully into poetry the reality in their personal experiences and perceptions during the war. As Norman Kelvin points out, the flower imagery in H.D.'s *Sea Garden* is not a series of symbols abstracted from particulars but condenses and energises the emotive and intellectual struggle in her life and in her practice as a poet (170-196). Zhao insists that Chen's practice in the 1940s manifests her persistence in taking a poetic stance and writing poetry from bodily experience (7). Therefore, H.D. and Chen's poetry of 'new beauty' as well as their other writing during the war, in actual fact has strong ties with reality.

The contrast outlined above between the criticism over detachment and the poets' practice reveals that those labelling the poetry as escapist not only misread it, but also dismissed it. Based on a gender bias, criticism belittled and marginalised their work, a situation that will be discussed from two perspectives: the gender of the poets and the gender politics of the dominant discourse.

To begin: is the misreading and negative criticism of the early poetry of H.D. and Chen caused by the poets' gender, as some of recent scholars claim? For example, Michael

Kaufmann argues that H.D.'s lack of recognition is largely due to her gender (59; 64). Undoubtedly, being women poets and writers, the fact of gender indeed shadows their reception and recognition in terms of the recording of literary history. As the beginning of my inquiry in Chapter Two suggests, the hostile social and cultural environment to women at that time oppressed their creativity and confined them to embodying feminine stereotypes. However, H.D. and Chen were not entirely dismissed by their respective literary circles. In fact, they were acknowledged as good poets in their own way by their contemporary readers and published good poems that received positive comments from critics in their own time. In other words, readers and critics could find acceptable and understandable meanings in these good poems or in the good parts of their poems. The touchstone in the critics' hands, however, was masculine characteristics. As Michael Kaufmann notes, if H.D.'s imagist forms were highly praised as being crystal clear it was because her style "accidentally fit" the prescribed ideal poetic principles privileging masculine ideology (59-60). In Chen's case, Tang Shi repeatedly praised the masculine characteristics in Chen's poems and extolled these masculine features as the representatives of "Chinese masculinity" forty years later!<sup>78</sup> He noted: "What I said to her was that her poetry was more masculine than the poet He Qifang, more powerful." ("Remembering Jingrong" 49) It is noteworthy that Zhao Yiheng agrees with Tang's comments about the masculinity in Chen's poetry in a more open and liberal atmosphere in the twenty-first century (Zhao 7). It is therefore clear that although gender is not the primary reason to disparage and remove women poets from literary history, the male gendered critical discourse is.

The impression that H.D. and Chen's early poems avoid real life is derived from the simple conclusion that they are ambiguous and distant. In other words, these poems are difficult to understand within the dominant critical discourse of modernism. Those critics in

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<sup>78</sup> See his first comments in "The Serious Stars" and the second in "Remembering Chen Jingrong".

H.D.'s time such as Harold Monro and Amy Lowell, criticised her poetry as petty, although they acknowledged and praised her poetic techniques. Harold Monro remarked that H.D.'s poems were "petty poetry" and "fragile" (79). Amy Lowell criticised H.D.'s poetry for its narrowness and lack of scope by borrowing Hamlet's irony, commenting: "[b]ut merely that 'there are more things in Heaven and Earth' than such poetry takes cognizance of" (279). Meng Liansu observes that Chen's poetry was attacked as petty, "ambiguous", "obscure", and "hard to understand" by some of her contemporaries (126). Therefore, poetry with unfamiliar content that disturbed the normative and habitual comprehension revealed a failure of the existing critical discourse to grasp its full meaning.

This failure exposes the gender bias in the dominant critical discourse of modernism where the masculine aesthetic is privileged. In such critical discourse, the concepts reflecting masculine values, such as Reason, power, history, religion, and politics, taking the superior position, are labelled as demonstrating "seriousness". As the feminist Alicia Ostriker argues by quoting Ralph Emerson: "thoughts may be ejaculated as Logos, or Word", the most compelling terms of literary critical discourse implied that serious poetry was more or less identical with potent masculinity (3). Correspondingly, those concepts that demonstrate feminine values, such as sentiment and emotion were seen as inferior. The social crises in the context of modernism that called for salvation and restoration deepened this division. Because it tells the story of gods and heroes and deals with "grand" subject matters the epic, for example, is regarded as more valuable than lyrics in aesthetics in the tradition of English poetic criticism (Kaufmann 60). The "Men of 1914" engaged in writing epic works thus configure and dominate transatlantic modernism, such as the poetry of T.S. Eliot. In Chinese modern poetry, revolutionary realism triumphs over modernism, because it reveals the social problems of 'real' life and provides 'serious' discussions and solutions. However, as was discussed in earlier chapters, the seriousness invested in discussing women's conditions of



existence derived from their experience is neglected in this critical discourse and mistakenly read as incomprehensible and obscure. Under this poetic hierarchy, the poetry of ‘new beauty’, along with other poems of both H.D. and Chen, is inevitably disparaged and overlooked because it is presented in modernist lyric form and refers to so-called trivial and distant subject matter.

Recent feminist critics have revealed this gender bias underlying the masculinist poetic critical discourse operating on H.D. and Chen’s works. After the war, a new order took shape and became a new tradition impacting on viewing modernism. In post-war England, a new literary authority, represented by the “Men of 1914” was established. Vincent Sherry observes that “The avant-garde is turned forward through the war into a retrograde state, a neoclassicism as guarded and fragile as the postwar calm of the early 1920s” (10). In China, post-war literature is overshadowed by the intense political atmosphere during the civil war (1946-1948). Literature was considered as a political tool by both the Communist and Nationalist parties. However, leftist ideology, enhanced by Mao Zedong’s 1942 Talks, became dominant in Chinese cultural policy and practice.<sup>79</sup> In “Chinese literature from 1937 to the present” (2010), Michell Yeh points out that “a call for wholesale politicisation of artistic creation, the “Talks” were to dictate CCP [Chinese Communist Party] cultural policy for decades to come” (594). The new discourse of modernism formulated by the new order respectively in England and China concealed women’s modernist experiments and explorations. In her essay “Who Buried H.D.?” (1975), Susan Friedman points out that there is a general pattern in criticism that distorts the understanding of H.D.’s poems and this

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<sup>79</sup> Mao Zedong convened a symposium for writers and artists in May 1942. His opening and concluding remarks are known as “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” (*Zai Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua*, or “Talks”). Mao defines literature and art as, necessarily and without exception, indicative of class origin and ideology. Quoting Lenin, Mao uses the image of cogs and screws to indicate the function of literature and art, which means they need to serve communist revolutionary purpose. Specifically, the spirit of the “Talks” privileges the revolutionary literature as literature for the masses.

distortion inevitably harms the poet's reputation (806). Michael Kaufmann argues that the masculinist aesthetics dominating the understanding of modernism has misread and overlooked the importance of H.D. in forming the first example of Anglo-American modernism (59). He points out that H.D.'s objective method, centring on the qualities of objective things, in depicting flowers in the poems brings out "much greater impersonality" than her male contemporaries, such as Pound (62). When Pound places the speaker and *his* observations at the centre of a poem, the image remains decorative rather than standing for the things in themselves which he advocates in Imagism. For example, the flower in his "In a Station of the Metro" exhibits no more than prettiness which is a quality to attract the speaker. However, the sea flowers in H.D.'s poetry have their unique autonomy. By comparing the flower imagery, Kaufmann argues that the misreading leads to the impression of these works as obscure, belittles the uniqueness and creativity in her works and weakens evaluation of H.D.'s contribution to modernism. Similarly, in her dissertation titled *The Inferno Tango: Gender Politics and Modern Chinese Poetry, 1917–1980*, Meng Liansu contends that the unjust accusations against Chen from leftist critics is caused by their ignorance of the poet's female-centred perspective.

In this male-centred critical discourse, the writing grounded in a female-centred perspective is inexorably marginalised. As Ostriker points out, this bias underlying critical discourse denigrates women poets' originality (10). Accordingly, women's experience derived from female-bodily practice, exemplified in the case of H.D. and Chen, does not make sense within such a critical discourse. Moreover, the arrogance derived from the hegemony of male-centred critical discourse that has little intention of understanding this heterogeneous, or rather disturbing collection of meanings and experience constructed in these poems simply subsumes them under the name of poetic failure. Critics such as Lowell, evaluating H.D.'s flower-poems within this discourse thus could not find significant meaning

in the content of the poems, claiming that they had “no scope” as I mentioned earlier. It seems that these flower poems were only intended for the sake of formal experiment. Chen’s critics also expressed their confusion about her poetry. A just and thorough understanding and evaluation from the existing critical discourse is thus impossible.

In this situation, gender, if not having a negative impact on the critics’ comprehension, is at least indifferent to them, since in leaving no clues as to how to be read, it fails through no fault of its own, to contribute to their understanding. When H.D.’s objectivity in depicting poetic image is taken as masculine impersonality, her flower poems become excellent imagist models for these critics. However, when the same critics use the traditional notion of beauty as prettiness, they criticised these flower-poems as obscure and limited. Perhaps it was chiefly to suit these same critics that H.D.’s pseudonym hides her gender. Chen’s case is more dramatic. In one of the negative critiques from the Leftist critics she is mistakenly addressed as “he” (see the quotation in p. 196). The misreading of the poetry of ‘new beauty’ in the dominant male-centred critical discourse thus exposes its failure: there is no discursive space for women’s experience, being both alien and beyond its understanding. Therefore, the problem of misreading is not a problem caused by the gender of the poets *per se* but the gender bias, an unequal power-relation between men and women, foundational to the critical discourse.

## 5.2 A Problem of Symbolism: the conflict between the imagined and ‘real’ women

The neglect of the poetry of ‘new beauty’ in the male-centred critical discourse reveals that there is a privileged masculinist discourse governing the writing of literary history. This gender conflict reveals that viewing beauty is not only an aesthetic issue but also

reflects the power structures of gender, particularly in the way symbols are habitually read, in a broad sense. In this sense, the poetry of 'new beauty' as the discourse of beauty attempts to not only revise aesthetic tradition, but also to challenge the masculinist discourse. The poets' poetic experiment exposes the hegemony of masculinist discourse because it conceals the gender-based experience based on women's practice of judging the beautiful, the often different 'reality' from women's eyes. This functional discursive hegemony thus brings to light a conflict between the imaged women in a masculinist discourse and women living in reality.

Literary feminism has endeavoured to expose a male-dominated symbolic system. By unearthing and re-evaluating some lesser-known women writers in literary history, Anglo-American feminists attempted to explain why they have been neglected and isolated from literary history. Numerous research since the middle of the 1970s has revealed that the domination of patriarchal ideology has heavily affected on both the writing and acceptance of these women's works. For example, in her influential work *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Elaine Showalter, in her project to establish a tradition of women's writing, reveals how the canonisation of male works monopolises the establishment of literary history and determines the method of reading. Gilbert and Gubar open *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) with the question of whether a pen is a metaphor for the penis. By so doing, they expose a patriarchal tradition in the history of writing and call for understanding women's writing and creativity against this set of patriarchal principles.<sup>80</sup> Following these cutting-edge feminist explorations, Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua point out how women's writing was manipulated by the patriarchal literary institution in the first half of the twentieth century in China. In *Emerging from the Horizon of the History*, the authors observe that the women's writing during the time from

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<sup>80</sup> See the chapter 1 in Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000.

1917 to 1940s experiences a change from being encouraged to being marginalised by the mainstream of literature. This change, according to Meng and Dai, exposes the dominance of patriarchal ideology in literary discourse, since this literary discourse neglects the need of women's self-articulation and the values in women's writing, but only exploits it to serve the revolutionary ends conceived by the mainstream male writers.

The study of the symbolic order underlying patriarchal society reveals a male-centred discourse, the masculinist discourse. It consists of masculine concepts and representations that reflect the power relations constructed through gender distinctions. Centred on masculine values, this discourse consolidates the hegemony of males by formulating a binary of masculinity and femininity.<sup>81</sup>

In the existing dominant discourse, the gender binary exerts a powerful influence in perceiving and comprehending the external world, since gender is exploited as a primary category for differentiation. In this process, the function of the human body and its relationship to the external world is emphasised. Pierre Bourdieu elucidates in *Masculine Domination* (2001):

the work of symbolic construction is far more than a strictly performative operation of naming which orients and structures representations, starting with representations of the body . . . it is brought about and culminates in a profound and durable transformation of bodies (and minds). (23)

This explains the process of how symbolism establishes itself through bodily experience and knowledge. This process, the way symbolism works and exercises its violence is called “eternalising [the] arbitrary” by Bourdieu (vii). Mary Ellmann labels this phenomenon as “the

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<sup>81</sup> Hélène Cixous firstly brings up the theory of masculinity/femininity binary in “Sorties”. She insightfully reveals that binary oppositions prevailing in Western philosophy and literary thoughts always in the end come back to the fundamental couple of male/female (“Sorties” 63-65).

thought of sexual analogy” (6). Helen Haste explicates this further when she argues that it is so much a part of our world-view that we construct many folk models and lay social theories to explain and justify our conception of gender and sex difference (Haste 60). The paradigm of binary thinking, based on gender, originated by simple analogy and was enhanced by persuasive scientific discoveries made by biologists, medical researchers, and psychologists, since the nineteenth century, which emphasised the anatomical difference between male and female (Robinson 4). Like the Western tradition, gender difference in Chinese culture is attached to the *yin-yang* binary, the fundamental binary opposition in Chinese cosmology and philosophy.<sup>82</sup> Originating from the *I Ching*, one of the key texts constructing the foundation of Chinese Culture compiled more than two thousand years ago, the *yin* and the *yang* are fundamental natures (givens) in the universe. Literarily, *yin* is the symbol of the sun, while the *yang* indicates the moon. Based on analogy, the terms of *yin* and *yang* were given gender significance and hierarchised in the context of Dong Zhongshu’s imperial Confucianism in the Han dynasty (134 BC) (R. Wang 209-231). The masculinity/ femininity binary thus operates in Chinese culture through the Confucian discourse of the *yin-yang*.

Feminists have questioned the masculinity/femininity binary and revealed an underlying ideology of phallogocentrism, the priority and superiority of masculinity over femininity in the construction of meaning. Phallogocentrism, combining the term logocentrism and phallocentrism, is a deconstructive term created by Jacques Derrida in his essay “Plato’s Pharmacy” (1981). Logocentrism is the term Derrida uses to refer to the philosophy of determinateness, while phallocentrism is the term he uses to describe the way

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<sup>82</sup> This idea is elaborated in the following essays: Benjamin I. Schwartz, “Correlative Cosmology: The School of Yin and Yang,” *The World of Thought in Ancient China* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 351-382; Alison Harley Black, “Gender and Cosmology in Chinese Correlative Thinking,” *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. C. W. Bynum, S. Harrell, and P. Richman Boston: Beacon Press, p. 1; Qingzhong, Yang. “Possible Inspiration Offered by the Yin-Yang Theory of *The Book of Changes (Yi Jing)* regarding the Course of Human Culture in the Twenty-First Century.” *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2008, pp. 23-38.

logocentrism itself has been genderised by a “masculinist (phallic)” and “patriarchal” agenda. Derrida’s term inspired feminists, such as Hélène Cixous, to develop their feminist theories against this gendered cultural hegemony. Based on the difference of a biological sexual category, the binary exaggerates the difference between males and females. Accordingly, as Haste points out, this binary indicates hierarchies resulting from negation and evaluation when the former employs the exclusive categories of *either...or...* (188).

Gender hierarchy, based on the “*either...or...*” logic, is formulated by a subject-object dualism between males and females. In the subject-object dualism, males, designating women as the other, arbitrarily take the position of subject and allocate the position of object to women. In so doing, social and moral privileges are assigned to men who take on the subject-position through the operation of masculinist discourse. Accordingly, the attributes of subjects, such as activeness and power of control, are masculine, while attributes of objects, such as passivity and inertia, are assigned to women as femininity. Femininity thus demands objectification of women in the subject-object opposition. Beauvoir contends that the self-assertion of women as such will take their femininity away since to be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive and docile (359). The social and cultural opposition of men and women thus is formulated by and bound to the opposition of masculinity and femininity, registering respectively the subjective and the objective positions.

In this sense, the hierarchical gender binary is the outcome of the patriarchal hegemony in the process of making meanings, or as Monique Wittig argues, this gender division is a socially *constructed product* of patriarchal hierarchies which are political categories (247). In order to celebrate masculine values and to underpin their dominance, femininity assumes a role that degrades and devalues women as passive, weak, and less important than their male counterpart. The confinement of women occurs within the formulated other as femininity diminishes their heterogeneous threat while affirming male

subjectivity. In this sense, the masculinity/femininity binary is not a result of biological difference but springs from the need to affirm and underpin the domination and supremacy of men. Positioned in the place of the subject, males are centred in this discourse while women are marginalised. This appropriation of power thus neglects in a strategic manner the sameness between men and women as equal human beings. As a consequence, subject to the hegemony of the opposite sex, women are confined to their sex as vulnerable femininity.

Inevitably, the aesthetic concept of beauty within masculinist discourse is by no means immune from the effect of the masculinity/femininity binary. Moreover, reflecting a relation between subject and object, modern aesthetics is an ideal place to observe such a binary at work. The formulation of the dualism between the beautiful and the sublime, discussed in the previous chapter, reflects and enhances the gender binary within modern aesthetic discourse.

The division of beauty and sublimity is based on a subject-object dualism. Focusing on the subject's feelings of pleasure in the aesthetic judgment, the Burke-Kantian aesthetics conceives the beautiful as objective pleasure and the sublime the subjective. The beautiful is objective because the features pleasing the judging subject are limited to the form of the particular object. The sublime is considered to be subjective, because pleasure is considered to be derived from the mind of the subject. The division, taking a position in relation to the subject and privileging the (male) subject, therefore reveals that modern aesthetics reflects the latter's values.

The concepts of beauty and sublimity, therefore, have acquired gender significance through the structure of the subject-object dualism. Femininity is inscribed in the concept of beauty, as the beautiful celebrates the virtue of the object; whereas the concept of sublimity is akin to masculinity, since sublimity reflects the thinking, judging subject's victory. In



*Enquiry*, Burke attaches categories of gender to either the beautiful or the sublime by appropriating gender metaphors to elaborate and illustrate the features of each category. As Philip Shaw argues, Burke associates the sublime with “the authority of the father”, while the beautiful is aligned with a “mother’s fondness and indulgence” (Shaw 58). Burke’s theory of the beautiful shares some of the vocabulary of femininity, such as smallness, softness and delicacy, while linking masculine empowerment to the cause of the sublime (Burke 131-132 and 149-151). Kantian formulation more consciously sets out to establish the relation of the aesthetic dualism to the gender binary. In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Kant writes: “all the merits of a woman should unite solely to enhance the character of the beautiful, which is the proper reference point; and on the other hand, among the masculine qualities the sublime clearly stands out as the criterion of his kind.” (*Observations* 78) He continues, “the fair sex has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a beautiful understanding, whereas ours should be a deep understanding, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime” (*Observations* 78) In these comments, Kant not only provides a gender association for the beautiful and the sublime by allocating them separately to each sex but also appropriates the hierarchy between the two aesthetic concepts based on this binary. Taking a male stand as a position of *we* opposed to the female suggests that Kant puts the sublime in a higher place thus praising masculine values by affirming the triumph of the masculine subject. Contemporary critics draw attention to the gender binary and hierarchies within this tradition. Feminists, for example, Barbara Freeman, in *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (1995), expose the gender binary as well as the power relation attached to aesthetic dualism (73-75). From the perspective of aesthetic philosophy, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, in *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (1999), notes that this dualism has gender and hierarchy and “beauty always does and always is feminine”

(1). Zhou Laixiang's observation in "Harmony and Chinese Beauty" (2012) provides an idea of this gender attachment in Chinese aesthetics. He writes:

"Yin and Yang," the feminine and the masculine in nature, is an important duality in Chinese classical philosophy. In ancient times it was thought, "the feminine and the masculine are the basis of everything." Stillness is feminine, for example, and movement is masculine. This led to the distinction in ancient China of two types of beauty, a feminine beauty and a masculine beauty (210).

Zhou's observation suggests that the feminine beauty is the delicate beauty equal to beauty in its modern use in the Chinese context and the masculine beauty is the virile form of beauty considered as sublimity in modern aesthetics.

Attached to the gender binary, the hierarchy between beauty and sublimity reveals the inevitable gender-political implications of aesthetic dualism. Coupled with gender difference, power relations between the two sexes is the inevitable corollary of aesthetic dualism. The gendered binary of beauty and sublimity in line with the resulting inequity in power relations, therefore, consciously or unconsciously, operates and governs much of the thinking on beauty and sublimity in both aesthetic theory and practice.

The comparison in terms of gender between the traditional concept of beauty and 'new beauty' suggests that the estrangement effect in creating 'new beauty' images is derived from the devoice between beauty and femininity. In other words, poetic estrangement recast a concept of beauty by defeminising conventionalised beauty.

The most striking example of this, as I have shown, lies these two poets' treatments of the flower imagery, the core symbol of beauty, in the poetry of 'new beauty'. In a literary and aesthetic tradition, flowers are the representation of beauty inasmuch as they embody the richest feminine elements. Based on sociolinguistic research, McCarl-Nielsen and Hegstorm

confirm that: “the flower metaphor encompasses images of delicacy, prettiness, fragility, and sweet smelling, characteristics culturally described as feminine.” (228) Both Burke and Kant use flowers to exemplify the concept of beauty in their theoretical works. However, H.D. and Chen portray a different kind of flower imagery in which all the traditional feminine merits disappear. The flower represents the notion of ‘new beauty’ with its defective and rough appearance (sea roses with few petals and leaves in the “Sea Rose”) or even with its absence (a branch without flowers in “The Non-Flowering Branch”).

The two poets also create imagery of wildness and activeness to challenge the femininity represented by conventionalised beauty. In H.D.’s poetry, the garden as a traditional symbol of femininity is transformed from a passive and inert one to an open and constructed one. The garden of ‘new beauty’ actually welcomes wildness. Without design, it is shaped in a free and active way when it confronts nature. By exposing itself to wildness and violence, this garden thus is defeminised. In the same vein, the ‘new beauty’ images in Chen’s poems, are placed in a wild and open space confronting nature.

Moreover, the two poets symbolise a process of defeminisation by locating ‘new beauty’ at a borderline. The obvious borderline in H.D.’s poetry is the meeting point between land and sea. Land is a feminine metaphor, given the quality of passive generality underlying the symbolising imagination associated with land. The sea functions as a metaphor of violence and openness because of its vastness and mystery. Whereas the ground is solid, suggesting stability, the wild sea is uncontrollable, and its corollary, uncertainty. The two contrasting metaphors thus manifest the opposition between inertia and change, passivity and activity. That the poet moves the garden away from a hill towards the sea in the “Sheltered Garden” implies a transition involving defeminisation. H.D.’s strategy construed via her image of a borderline thus suggests an escape from femininity, while Chen creates borderline images that contest femininity. Chen locates images of her ‘new beauty’ in the form of a

temporal borderline, that of late autumn or dusk. Late autumn means the coming of winter, and dusk indicates that night is falling. Culturally, both winter and night are feminine symbols, reflecting the latter's inert and passive features. Through active performance, however, the image of 'new beauty' standing at the edge of winter or night, manifests a resistance to inertia. For example, that the non-flowering branch shivers and the leaves fly in autumn manifests a struggle against immobility in winter ("The Non-Flowering Branch"). The birds singing and the leaves shivering in the dusk signal a contest with the silence and tranquillity of night. ("The Fresh Thirsty"). The resistance to night is expressed even more patently and directly in "The Edge outside of the Edge". In this poem, Chen creates images of grassland and shivering dew spreading towards the edge of night that resist its engulfment and seek for residence in a space outside.

The emergence of 'new beauty', breaching the fixed link between the signifier of beauty and its signified femininity through the poetic technique of estrangement, thus reveals a failure of masculinist discourse to register the experience of beauty inscribed in the poetry of 'new beauty'. Luce Irigaray takes this as an excess, a fragment of the existence of women detected within masculinist discourse. In *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985) she argues:

the rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary certainly puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) 'subject' to reflect himself. (30)

In this sense, the 'new beauty' contests the masculinity/femininity binary from a female-centred position. In terms of Kantian observation on making a judgement of beauty, the judgement of beauty is related to and based on individual experience exercised through the imagination. The beauty-judging mechanism thus entails a free entrance of the individual

experience to the judgement of beauty. In this sense, the representation of beauty in a poem embodies the experience of the poet. The contradiction, therefore, between the two types of beauty in question reveals the gender difference in the judging and experiencing subject of beauty. The new experience, underlying the conflict between images of 'new beauty' and those of traditional beauty, calls the universal adequacy of the masculinist discourse into question by exposing a similar conflict between imagined women in masculinist discourse (as objects) and 'real' women (as subjects).

In dominant masculinist discourse, women have been symbolised and metaphorized by feminised objects, objects with so-called feminine qualities. In other words, the concept of these objects becomes "women as words" in Mary Ellmann's words (xv). From a literary perspective, Ellmann reveals that the establishment of the symbols and metaphors associated with women is a historical and cultural process with gender bias, a bias that ranges from individual and occasional usage through to near universal stereotypes. As she formulated other to men, women are neutralised as objects that reflect feminine merits. Ellmann points out that the objects attached to femininity become symbols and metaphors of women in language through literary figurative association. The repeated association of women with certain feminised objects in language makes these symbols and metaphors become social axioms which in turn become stereotypes that register women in language (Ellmann 74). For example, she argues that women come to seem deciduous and men evergreen because things in linearity are thought to be masculine and cyclical and repetitious structures and identities are regarded as the province of the feminine (Ellmann 184). During this process, the feminised woman is invented by masculinist discourse, based on the imagination that favours masculine values. Beauvoir provides an explicit elaboration of this process operated by the gender binary in *The Second Sex* and terms the feminisation of women as the myth of women. She notes: "the myth of women sublimates an immutable aspect of the human

condition: that is, the ‘division’ of humanity into two categories of individuals. This is a static myth” (275). In this process, women are discursively feminised. As we can see, the reality of women is concealed because the possible link between the female-body and its external world is hidden in a masculinist narrative. If the masculinist discourse formulates a universal knowledge, the female body is neutralised. If this discourse enhances the gender hierarchy, the biological difference between the male and female body is exaggerated. In this sense, women as represented in masculinist discourse are not flesh-blood human beings but symbols. Rosi Braidotti claims that “this ‘feminine’ bears no immediate or even direct relationship to real-life women. It is a typically masculine attitude that turns male disorders into feminine values” (79).

Moreover, the aesthetic discourse of beauty takes this imagination to the extreme by idealising women with pleasing feminised images and metaphors. In this respect, the concept of beauty and that of women share a cluster of registers in masculinist discourse. Moreover, beauty as an aesthetic judgment assuming the role of evaluation promotes the feminised images of women, since it constructs masculine values, defining and representing the pleasure of male subjects. In this sense, women constructed in and through feminine images are translated into the masculinist discourse of beauty. The traditional discourse of beauty thus becomes the rhetoric of women who are produced by masculine imagination.

The image of ‘new beauty’ represents an alternative type of woman which at best, escapes a masculinist definition. These two poets connect the concept of beauty to praxis. Beauty thus is concrete and material rather than a symbol. At this point, beauty reflects the concealed reality. Beauvoir acutely observes the existence of these two types of women and contends: “men ‘invent’ women as femininity, but women also exist without their invention” (209). The poetry of ‘new beauty’ thus exposes the truth that the masculinity/femininity binary, with gender-related hierarchies, authorises a male voice to dominate discourse. As a

consequently, not only is the existence of women in a historic account erased, but the voice of women as well as their subjectivity is also concealed. As Beauvoir reveals, women and their subjectivity exist but fail to appear; they are not silent, but their language is not heard (278-279). However, there are always undercurrents and the poetry of ‘new beauty’ represents one of them.

To summarise: women presented by the poetry of ‘new beauty’ can be the subject of judging beauty, autonomous and active in relation to the objective world, rather than passively remain a part of the objective world. In this formulation, the new relationship between a female body and the external world defined by the ‘new beauty’ thus reclaims the agency of women.

### 5.3 The Redefinition of Women: women’s transcendence symbolised by the empowerment of beauty

The agency and subjectivity of women is made visible by women’s transcendence symbolised by the empowerment of beauty. The poetry of ‘new beauty’ inscribes the lost experience from women’s practice and brings the historically concealed group—who “hold up half the sky”—into light.<sup>83</sup> As I will show, women’s transcendence exists and can be actualised through beauty rather than sublimity. Taking beauty as the way to actualise transcendence, the poetry of ‘new beauty’, as the discourse of beauty, challenges the foundation of both the beauty/sublimity and masculinity/femininity binary. In this sense, the

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<sup>83</sup> The saying that women hold up half the sky emerges from China in 1960s in the communist discourse of Maoism to politically and officially promote gender equality. However, numbers of scholars contend that this slogan along with the communist policy about women during the second half of the twentieth century remains patriarchal since it dismisses the gender difference and urges women to perform like men. See more details in Lydia H. Liu’s “Invention and Intervention: The Female Tradition in Chinese Modern Literature” (1993).

poetry of ‘new beauty’, differing from and contrasting with the masculinist discourse, forms a new feminist discourse.

As I discussed in Chapter Four, Kantian theory considers the sublime which helps the subject detaching sensibility (embodiment) to achieve spiritual elevation as a means of transcendence. Because of this moral function, sublimity triumphs over beauty in Kantian aesthetics. The embodiment of Kantian transcendence has been questioned as an example of masculinist method by feminists. As Nancy Arden McHugh remarks, this philosophy of embodiment overlooking the influence of body on the mind, neutralises (masculinises) human bodies on the one hand and distances women from knowledge and Reason on the other. In this sense, tying transcendence to sublimity deprives women of agency. (35-36).

In this chapter, I reveal that the ‘new beauty’ symbolises what Beauvoir terms women’s transcendence in *The Second Sex*, which exhibits women’s subjectivity in existentialist transcendence. Existential transcendence, as Mitchell Aboulafia shows, refers not to transcending the human body but transcending *with* it. He defines transcendence as a supersession of the given, the accepted, the familiar, or the weight of circumstance (16). In this sense, women’s agency is returned (and vitalised) through bodily engagement. As Rosi Braidotti argues, the female feminist subject starts, therefore, with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting any universal, neutral, and consequently gender-free understanding of human embodiment (79).

### **5.3.1 Actualisation of Individual Women’s Transcendence: Beauvoirian existentialist theory**



Beauvoir conceives of the concept of transcendence by pairing it with immanence to formulate a dichotomy from an existentialist perspective. Her assumption is that women as equal individuals to men also have just as many possibilities as men to actualise a critical but subjective transcendence that would challenge the patriarchal order. Beauvoir observes that the way to achieve transcendence for many women is blocked and further points out that it is gender inequity in a patriarchal society that historically and socially impedes all women in their search to actualise transcendence. Her conception of women's transcendence thus revolves around two questions: "in a feminine condition, can the human being accomplish herself? What paths are open to her?" (17).

The concept of transcendence in *The Second Sex* is multi-faceted. In order to discuss the question of gender in relation to this term, my study adopts three important aspects in the Beauvoirian conception of transcendence: for every individual human being the transcendence/immanence dichotomy is universal; existentialist morality calls for every individual to actualise transcendence as self-accomplishment so as to manifest his/her subjectivity, and the actualisation of transcendence sustains gender difference. These three aspects account for the possibility of actualising women's transcendence and the strategic significance of this actualisation in constructing their subjectivity.

The concept of transcendence in *The Second Sex* has been a controversial topic since the 1970s. For decades, feminist critics have viewed the Beauvoirian transcendence as a synonym for masculinity and argue that Beauvoirian concept of transcendence celebrates the pre-eminence of masculine values by constructing a philosophy grounded in masculine ontology.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Feminist scholars criticised the lack of originality in Beauvoir's conception of transcendence and assumed that she had been directly borrowed the concept from either Jean-Paul Sartre, the pre-eminent French existentialist philosopher, or as the legacy of Hegel and Marx. Jean Leighton notes these negative critiques in *Simone de Beauvoir on Women* Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975. pp. 38-40;

However, recent interpretations of Beauvoir, attempt to defend her female-centred reconstruction of transcendence, a discovery that reflects a remarkable originality and creativity. Nadine Changfoot, for instance, contends that Beauvoir questions, rather than celebrates, masculine ontology by critiquing the construction of male subjectivity that represents woman as absolute otherness in *The Second Sex* (391-410). Zeynap Direk, points out that Beauvoir raises the issue of oppression operated by sexism and gender difference in actualising transcendence. (49-72). Andrea Veltman carefully distinguishes the concepts of transcendence and immanence in Beauvoir's work from those of Sartre and Hegel.<sup>85</sup> She underscores Beauvoir's originality in formulating the transcendence/immanence dichotomy as two modes of existence, which entail women's transcendence. Veltman further points out that labelling the Beauvoirian concept of transcendence as a masculine mark is a misinterpretation insofar as it fails to distinguish the notion of Beauvoir's concepts from their sources and references.

My reading of the Beauvoirian concept of transcendence is based on these three critics: Changfoot, Direk, and Veltman. According to Veltman, Beauvoir redefines the concept of transcendence and immanence as two opposed, yet related, modes of existence that combine both subjective movements of consciousness and the considerably more circumscribed set of human actions (227). Based on Beauvoir's assumption that every existence is simultaneously immanence and transcendence (Beauvoir 276), Veltman argues that the concept of transcendence in *The Second Sex* cannot be fully understood without referring to the concept of immanence. Veltman, in this sense, posits a contextual reading of

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Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva. "Simone De Beauvoir and Ethics." *History of European Ideas*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1994, pp. 899-903.

<sup>85</sup> Veltman interprets Beauvoirian transcendence and immanence respectively in two articles. One is "Transcendence and Immanence in the Ethics of Simone de Beauvoir" (2006) collected in *The Philosophy of Simone De Beauvoir: Critical Essays*. The other is "The Concept of Transcendence in Beauvoir and Sartre" (2009) collected in *Beauvoir and Sartre: The Riddle of Influence*.

transcendence and immanence. She observes that the metaphysical meanings of transcendence and immanence, as with Sartre and Hegel, largely drop out in *The Second Sex*. Instead, these two concepts become delineated primarily as a typology of activities or as active and passive modes of existing in accounting for the development of human history from an anthropological and historical materialist perspective (228). The human body and the living situation play fundamental roles in Beauvoirian formulation of the two dualistic concepts in question. In other words, Beauvoirian transcendence has a bodily base rather than within consciousness as Sartre conceives. This means that Beauvoir uses transcendence and immanence in a concrete way to designate concrete activities rather than appropriating the binary as two abstract terms. With respect to human activities in history, the gulf between males and females formulated by gender differences registered in the masculinity/femininity binary is therefore undone. Feminist critic Claire Colebrook points out that the dominating historic narrative is a masculinist version of historiography in which men creates themselves through history and philosophy (11). In a similar context, Kristeva argues that women bound to the *feminine* are associated with non-being but posited by metaphysics.<sup>86</sup> In her influential essay “Women’s Time”, Kristeva criticises the fact that *timeless* idealising femininity and feminine beauty bracket women from the narrative of history and thereby deprives them of agency (187-213). Beauvoir’s conception of transcendence and immanence posits situational, contingent, or provisional eventuality against epochal masculinist historicity. The treatment of transcendence and immanence as the mode of existence, thus entails the actualisation of transcendence for both males and females as equal human beings, the participators in historical progression. If women have been mythologised and deprived of agency in human

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<sup>86</sup> This statement originally from the essay “Il n’y a pas de maître a langage,” *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*, no. 20 (Autumn 1979). The translation is from Jardine, Alice. “Introduction to Julia Kristeva’s ‘Women’s Time’” (1981).

history, Beauvoirian re-conception relocates them in a concrete and material human history and thus reclaims their agency.

Moreover, the existential view and its ethics in Beauvoir's re-formulation of transcendence suggest that the actualisation of transcendence is a way to attest to the existence of women as subjects and to construct their subjectivity. Veltman argues that Beauvoir's adding a moral perspective to the construction of transcendence is an innovation. Beauvoir contends: "every subject needs to posit himself/herself as transcendence concretely, through projects; ... Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into 'in-itself', of freedom into facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it" (17). Beauvoir also claims: "every individual concerned with justifying his existence experiences his existence as an indefinite need to transcend himself" (17). She argues: "there is no other justification for present existence than its expansion towards an indefinitely open future" (17). Beauvoir further claims that transcendence is not to preserve the present, given world, but to burst its borders and lay the ground for a new future (76). From this position, transcendence propels subjects into the world through constructive or self-expressive projects. In this sense, the subject is visible in transcendence by conducting projects and reaching self-accomplishment. Subjectivity, accordingly, is constructed in this process by the proof of autonomy and creativity. Moreover, since every individual is entitled to be the subject of transcendence and is summoned to transcend, the subject of transcendence re-written according to Beauvoir is posited not only as masculine but is also accessible to women.

However, women's freedom in actualising transcendence in patriarchal society is conditioned and restrained. Beauvoir entangles the concept of transcendence with gender by raising the question of sexual oppression. She acutely observes that the actualisation of transcendence is different between men and women, because they occupy different social

situations and thus require different approaches. As Beauvoir notes, women have to choose between the affirmation of their transcendence and their alienation as objects (60). Beauvoir ascribes this gender difference to patriarchal society. Operated by the masculinity/femininity binary, transcendence is for males to celebrate masculine triumph; immanence is for women to maintain subordination. Because of this, male transcendence is privileged but women's is historically and socially restrained. On this basis Direk contends that the effectiveness of male transcendence and the difficulty of female transcendence are not the result of any biological privileges of men but the success of the patriarchal social order (Direk 59-60). And therefore, the failure of women to achieve transcendence is not because they are unable to accomplish and expand themselves, but because they lack the means to do so when confined to the masculinity/femininity binary. The effect of actualising their transcendence is to break the masculinity/femininity binary that will then enable women to be posited as the subject of transcendence which Beauvoir regards as the necessary first step.

More important, Beauvoir not only formulates a theory of women's transcendence but also considers its praxis in regard to individual women. The latter is what this study is concerned with, because its primary goal is understanding specific poets and their poetry rather than providing a theoretical inquiry of the subject. Some critics argue that Beauvoir's conception is contradictory and illusory. Recent criticism in this respect comes from Changfoot who considers the Beauvoirian concept of female transcendence as a utopian consolation.<sup>87</sup> She remarks that this transcendence only can exist elsewhere, outside existing social relations (404). What Changfoot overlooks, however, is the twofold aspect to the Beauvoirian conception: the collective and the individual. By treating the actualisation of transcendence as a series of creative activities, Veltman's interpretation not only endorses

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<sup>87</sup> Although defending Beauvoir's female stance, Changfoot shows her suspicion of Beauvoir's formulation of women's transcendence. See this in Changfoot, Nadine. "Transcendence in Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: Revisiting Masculinist Ontology." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2009, pp. 391-410.

Beauvoir's gender-linked concept of transcendence but also reveals a dialectic between women's transcendence as individual self-accomplishing practice and as collective emancipation. Beauvoir envisages the success of collective women's transcendence in the future, optimistically pointing out that the current failure of the actualisation of women's transcendence, which is of a collective nature, is only temporary, since it is conditioned within a patriarchal society (779). Women's collective transcendence is possible when adverse conditions are removed from society. Although this form of transcendence is ambiguous and questionable, as highlighted by Changfoot in her criticism of it, the other side of this term, *individual woman's transcendence*, is certain. Apart from her consideration of the future, Beauvoir also pays attention to the present, which is more closely related to individual practice. By viewing the present as a period of transition, she observes that the individual woman's transcendence is concrete and possible, thus constituting the foundation for the emancipation of women. This is because, she claims, women want both abstract rights and concrete possibilities (154-155). In this light, Beauvoir contends that the choice of women as individuals is concrete and specific, despite what difficulties might arise. As Beauvoir argues, the actualisation of women's transcendence is possible insofar as women engage in creative work. Beauvoir also observes the success of individual women's transcendence and claims that this is "being fulfilled" (155). This means that although women's collective transcendence is in the future, individual woman's transcendence is possible, actualised and ongoing. This judgment refutes the criticism that Beauvoir celebrates the victory of masculine values and confines women to failure. Women's transcendence in Beauvoir's formulation thus is neither masculine nor utopian. It is concrete and progresses along with social evolution.

The new interpretations of the Beauvoirian concept of transcendence thus provide a configuration of women's transcendence, one that emphasises self-expansion and her relation

to the external world. Women's transcendence is constructive, which relates to activities of progress, creation and discovery. In this sense, women's transcendence is where women as human beings are the equal subjects of transcendence. In other words, women have the potential to actualise their agency in individual concrete practice through their bodies, and thereby constructing their subjectivity in and through this process.

### **5.3.2 The Empowerment of Beauty: the symbolisation of women's transcendence**

In terms of Beauvoir's formulation, H.D. and Chen provide an aesthetic way to illuminate a path of transcendence for individual women through the poetry of 'new beauty'. The opposition between the images of 'new beauty' and conventionalised beauty aligns with the transcendence-immanence dichotomy. For Beauvoir, the actualisation of transcendence is based on an active movement. In transcendence, one attempts to surpass the present, burst into the future, and remain free from biological necessity. In this sense, transcendence is defined as being always on the horizon where actualisation is short-lived, being superseded by the pursuit and achievement of further projects. As the counterpart of transcendence, the notion of immanence is considered as degradation, merely preserving existence, the "in-itself" (17). Direk's interpretation suggests that immanence is an inert state of existence in the plenitude and darkness of being in itself (50). According to Veltman, the Beauvoirian concept of immanence designates an enclosure of futility that involves uncreative activities, marked by passivity, stasis, and submission to biological fate. The poetry of 'new beauty' thus symbolises the Beauvoirian reading of transcendence.

First, 'new beauty' is generated in-relation-to, while conventionalised beauty is confined to the objective form bearing prescribed qualities. The image of 'new beauty', as

already discussed, is related to a confrontation, a transformational encounter between the individual and its external world. In the poetry of 'new beauty', the meeting between the flowers/plants and wild nature signals this engagement. In other words, 'new beauty' is dependent on the individual's engagement with its surroundings. Engaging with the external, the image of 'new beauty' reifies a new form of transcendence. Conventionalised beauty, however, is solely embodied in the form of flowers. In this sense, traditional beauty is self-reflexive, thus manifesting an imprisonment in immanence.

Second, the 'new beauty' is to be found in dynamics, implying a potential self-expansion, whereas traditional beauty is both atemporal and motionless. For the images of 'new beauty', the key moment to rendering 'new beauty' and differentiating it from its conventionalised form lies in the response of Chen's and H.D.'s flowers/plants to the external world, a response that can be seen as being under permanent construction. Restrained to its conventionalised, immobile form, however, traditional beauty is structured by stability, being perpetually fixed by the nature of the object. In other words, traditional beauty is both static and self-sufficient and the contextual surroundings do not contribute to its formation. Because transcendence designates dynamics, by perpetually surpassing itself to achieve self-expansion, 'new beauty' manifests as a new and more radical form of transcendence. Conversely, traditional beauty is the embodiment of immanence, to return to the negative of Beauvoir's binary, due to its investment in maintaining the *status quo*, whereas, 'new beauty' situates itself in response to the activeness of the creating subject who actualises transcendence. That is because in activeness, transcendence as self-accomplishment attests to subjective success. To re-state, the flowers/plants imagery in 'new beauty' actively responds to the external world, showing their autonomy and independence as subjects, while traditional beauty remains motionless through objective display, and manifests immanence in its passivity and inertia.



That the two poets celebrate a 'new beauty' rather than a traditional one, suggests that they embrace transcendence instead of immanence. In this sense, the writing strategies of H.D. and Chen accord with the existentialist ethics of Beauvoir's formulation which attaches moral significance to transcendence. Accordingly, the 'new beauty', unlike the traditional one, is empowered by ethics.

Moreover, the transcendence in 'new beauty' is also gendered, since the new transcendence is manifested by a defeminised 'new beauty' without forsaking an active female agent. H.D. and Chen have thus demonstrated how women can achieve transcendence by detaching a trivialised, passive femininity through re-working the metaphors of women's bodies and their disenfranchised situation. As discussed earlier in this chapter, objects along with their attributes as the metaphors and symbols of women as feminine are not pre-given but historically and discursively produced in the masculinist discourse. The poetry of 'new beauty' demonstrates how women can achieve transcendence for women's bodies and their situations by creating different pictures of the once feminised objects in masculinist discourse. Women's practice of going beyond the physical and social limits exerted on their bodies which now become not for display but the site of dynamic confrontation.

The endurance and survival of the flower/plants imagery in the poetry of 'new beauty' represents the transcendence of the usual physical limits on a female body. By associating soft and attractive objects with women, the masculinist discourse deliberately exaggerates the passivity in the former's biological attributes and conceives incapable female bodies in a state of immanence. Conversely, the imagery in the poetry of 'new beauty' indicates objects able to withstand adversity and sustain themselves. By vitality from the inside, the flowers and plants as represented by H.D. and Chen survive and actually gain embodiment in the confrontation with violent nature despite their vulnerability. For example, the broken rose in the "Sea Rose" standing on the shifting ground, although its physical strength and capability

is very limited, freely and competently resists the wind and waves. The shivering non-flowering branch and leaves can only move slightly but they move with all their strength and power to show—and enact—their existence. Their survival and sustainability reveals the quality of courage, strength and self-reliance. Underlying the poetic metaphor then, the female body transcends its biological limitations and expands itself by its sheer vitality. This transcendence thus challenges the feminisation of women by refuting the notion that weakness and smallness are bound to biological failure; it suggests, by contrast, that smallness and weakness may be the facts of a female body but are not a limitation on its aesthetic or intellectual performance by individual women.

The imagery of ‘new beauty’ that privileges broken or absent flowers represents the transcendence of social limits on a female body because it is still free to symbolise an embodied fertility without pulling the association into passivity. The masculinist discourse suggests a masculinist view of women’s bodies, which highlights the fertility of a female body to veil its other more active capabilities. This implies that a woman’s body is not an able instrument of the subject who knows and creates, but is only a reproductive object. To contest this masculinist view, H.D. and Chen weaken the potential fertility of a female body captured by masculinist discourse by dismissing the significance of the so-called normal flowers which frequently in the past have carried sexual and reproductive significance. In the poetry of ‘new beauty’, the flower is broken, ill or even absent. In this formulation, women regain their autonomy and bodily freedom. Because the fertility metaphor is weakened, the female body is returned to a human body which is the intermedium between the subject and the external world just as it is for the male. Thus, women are revived as individuals and open to possibilities rather than confined to their reproductive function. Transcending the reproductive role, women are liberated from immanence and have opportunities to achieve self-accomplishment and transformation.

The imagery of ‘new beauty’ represents the transcendence of the social confinement of a female body. The imagery of a garden and night symbolise the living space of women, namely the respective locations of their bodies for H.D. and Chen. In masculinist discourse these images are enclosed, symbolising the confinement and potential formlessness of women’s bodies. The traditional garden in H.D.’s “Sheltered Garden” is well designed and bordered. Both the border and the covered fruit impress the fact that the plants here are isolated from the external world, being kept in perpetual immanence. This well-fenced garden with its flowers and tightly wrapped fruits, that symbolise women’s bodies, represents home, the enclosed and restraining living space for women prescribed by the masculinity/femininity binary. Conventionally, home, as an enclosed space separating the outside world from women, downplays women’s capabilities and controls them in the name of protection, which affirms their position as secondary in the family and society. In Chen’s poetry, the enclosed space is night, which symbolises the source of life, and is analogously considered as the womb, and a dark cavity. Night is also the space for the moon, conventionally the symbol of women. In both Western and Chinese culture, the sun is regarded as the symbol of males and the moon the symbol of females. In Greek myth, the god of the sun is Apollo and the moon is the territory of his sister Artemis. In Chinese culture, the moon and women share the same name and symbol: *yin*.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, night, due to its darkness and mystery, is a space imagined to accommodate women which, as has been discussed, is a masculine notion conveniently derived from the masculinity/femininity binary. In this sense, night has become an enclosed space, one that is culturally designated for women, whereby they are confined to passivity and hence, once again, immanence. The poetry of ‘new beauty’, however, provides an alternative vision of locating women’s bodies to symbolise the transcendence of the spatial

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<sup>88</sup> In *The Invention of a Discourse: Women's Poetry from Contemporary China*, Zhang Xiaohong provides an explicit elucidation about the relationship between night and women in Chinese culture based on the dualism of *yin-yang*.

limits on them: this breaches the enclosure to relocate the body in open space that looks towards a horizon of possibilities. In “The Sheltered Garden” H.D. uses three verbs that connote violence in parallel: she invites its force to break the border and tear away the cover. The fence should be “snapped off” and the garden needs to be “broken, scattered” in order to greet the advent of “new beauty”. Chen also provides a similar metaphor of breaking in her poem, “The Edge outside of the Edge”. In this poem, the shivering grassland, as the embodiment of ‘new beauty’, borders a place outside night. The transcendence of women thus is actualised because the grassland keeps extending, spreading towards “the edge outside of the edge”, until it breaks the enclosure of night to reach a place outside of it. The destiny of a woman thus is open to the uncertain future. The imagery of garden and night in H.D. and Chen’s ‘new beauty’ poetry is not enclosed but open and wild. The enclosed and inevitable life of a woman in conformity with the requirements of conventional femininity is dissolved and replaced by uncertainty and heterodox possibilities.

In this sense, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ provides a new understanding of women’s bodies by forging the estranging, unorthodox concept of a powerful beauty. All the assumptions of women’s bodies produced by masculinist discourse, therefore, are shattered. When surviving the onslaught of external power in the process of a concrete bodily confrontation, women’s bodies show their vitality. When the reproductive role is downplayed, they recover from passivity; when the spatial limitation is removed, they actively encounter the external world. Surpassing its social and biological limitations, women’s transcendence in this manner is actualised. In other words, women can be the subject of transcendence and go beyond their biological fate. The poets thus claim a radically new *subject-position* in order to reclaim the sovereignty of the body. In this sense, women’s subjectivity is constructed through the resistance to the many forms of bodily confinement inscribed in and associated with conventionalised images of beauty. In other words, women

reclaim their agency. 'Real' women as autonomous and subjective individuals may now lead a life open to the future.

Moreover, this model of women's transcendence informs an equal view of the relationship between the female subject and the other, which is distinctive from that formulated in masculinist discourse. As seen in the discussion in Chapter Four, the poetry of 'new beauty' dismisses the hierarchy between subject and object and envisions an equal relation between an *I* and the *other*. The poetry of 'new beauty' proposes a model of *double subjects* in the confrontation, the point where 'new beauty' emerges. The formulation reconstructs an equal relation between two parties in an encounter where each are given presence at the site of confrontation. Both *I* and the other take active positions with agency, which I term both of them as subjects in this encounter. The other, then, is not considered as submissive and inferior in this new double-subjects model. Here, the power relation inscribed in the masculinity/femininity binary is revised, reciprocity applied to replace disempowerment and domestication. The poetry of 'new beauty' formulates women's transcendence using a heterogeneous model that does not recognise. Hierarchical superiority achieved through incorporation and domestication.

Such heterogeneity in formulating subjects in the process of transcendence reveals the gender-consciousness of these two poets in creating 'new beauty'. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir observes that rejection is a strategy for women to express their doubts and mistrust of the masculine world. She insightfully discovers the conflict between the given, conventional understanding of philosophy and the radically different understanding and feeling that emerges from gender-based lived experience. In other words, the given understanding of the world becomes at issue when the lens of gender is introduced, and therefore, women may now choose to disagree with, and reject, the given logic that excludes their own experience. Beauvoir's observation is echoed by Anglo-American feminists in the

1970s. By revisiting women writers marginalised in literary history and establishing women's poetics, Gilbert and Gubar among others, argue that revision, a type of Beauvoirian rejection, reflects women's perspectives. Their observation and insights, in a theoretical way, account for the gender awareness of H.D. and Chen. However, the rebellion of women in Beauvoir and Gilbert and Gubar's accounts is only viewed as a negative non-cooperation. The double subjects in the poetry of 'new beauty' more deeply challenges the structure of masculinist discourse. This is because H.D. and Chen not only resist conventionalised symbols and metaphors of beauty but they create a strategically distinctive way to construct women's subjectivity, not only revising the images and notions concerning the feminine but more deeply revising the either / or logic of philosophy. By the same token they reveal the fundamental issues of masculinist discourse and indicate a convincing alternative perspective for women as artists.

The poetry of 'new beauty', therefore, establishes a feminist discourse outside of the masculinist discourse: it challenges the masculinity/femininity binary in the way of resistance; it constructs a new image of women out of women's experience; and finally, it constructs *double subjects* in a self-aware, strategic recognition of the alternative challenge to philosophy that this unique approach offers.

### **5.3.3 Beauty as the Battle Field: the issue of naming**

When the poetry of 'new beauty' is seen as a feminist discourse announcing subjectivity based on a female-centred view, the discussion approaches a deeper and more fundamental political issue in aesthetics here: the naming of women's aesthetic experience of elevation. The preceding discussion reveals the distinctiveness of the aesthetic experience

derived from the judgment of ‘new beauty’ which is constructed from women’s bodily practice, but why the conception of ‘new beauty’ has heterogeneous characteristics?

To answer this question adequately, I will compare the term ‘new beauty’ in my study with two influential terms: *female sublime* and *feminine sublime* discussed respectively in Patricia Yaeger’s “Towards a Female Sublime” (1989) and Barbara Freeman’s *The Feminine Sublime* (1995). These two accounts and my assessment here, all focus on women’s transcendence in literature and discover the double subjects in this transcendence. The focus of my study is beauty, whereas Yaeger and Freeman each focus on the sublime. It is my contention that ‘new beauty’ is the most appropriate term to register the heterogeneity in women’s transcendence as expressed through their aesthetic practice, rather than *female sublime* and *feminine sublime*.

Before embarking on the details of the comparison, however, the relationship between transcendence and sublimity requires further explanation. The preceding discussion suggests that the term transcendence and sublimity do not mean the same thing. Transcendence which means going beyond is a mode of existence, while sublimity is an aesthetic category which refers to an experience of astonishing and elevating moments. In this sense, the term transcendence is used to describe a human status vis à vis consciousness and the sublime is its aesthetic counterpart. Chapter Four also reveals that their link is historical, established as early as the eighteenth century. Robert Doran observes that “the modern characterisation of sublimity all hark back in some way to Longinus’s description of *hypsos* as the experience of transcendence (40). In this sense, the assumption which allows transcendence to equal sublimity, however, remain within masculinist discourse, which abstracts concrete aesthetic feeling and fixes it in aesthetic symbolism. The problem of Yaeger and Freeman’s terms is the case in point, because they take the link between transcendence and sublimity for granted without questioning it.

The heterogeneity in women's transcendence lies in their condition of existence, where the gender differences may occur and affect. In this sense, the condition of existence is the ground of comparing women and men's aesthetic experience of elevation. In other words, the configuration of heterogeneity in women's experience of the elevation in making aesthetic judgments must go beyond the aesthetic symbolism and back to its 'origin', the moment of judgment where the I connect to her external world. I contend that Yaeger and Freeman's problem is that they overlook the process of experience-construction. At this point, my assumption rests on the inquiry which can re-approach the original condition of existence by dismantling the link between transcendence and sublimity from the starting point of both signification and aesthetic judgement.

Patricia Yaeger, for example, introduces the term *female sublime* to designate the poetry embodying women's transcendence (192). She aims to address the question of how one may write poetry about the *other* without destroying the other's alienness (195). Yaeger establishes her theory in a traditional aesthetic theoretical framework and categorises the distinctive features of the empowerment of women as either enacting a *failed sublime*, as approaching a *sovereign sublime*, or as reflecting a *feminine sublime (pre-Oedipal sublime)*. For Yaeger, the sublime is the literary genre of empowerment (192). In terms of Yaeger's reading, all three types of sublimity as they appear in women's modernist poetry are eventually subsumed under the term *female sublime*. She claims that she coins the term to reinvent a new way of reading feminine experience which revises the so-called Romantic sublime. In her reading of modernist poetry written by women, such as Elizabeth Bishop and Nikki Giovanni, she discovers that women produce what she calls a prosody of transcendence, which is a mode of female experience (203; 208). Because of this, the female sublime, as a means of actualising transcendence, is formulated as a vocabulary of ecstasy and empowerment. The latter procedure is realised in a poetic construction of *double*



*subjects*. She observes the ensuing equality and argues that between the two subjects there is a power neither to govern nor to subjugate (202).

Barbara Freeman also provides an account of the distinctive nature of women's transcendence and in *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (1995) she uses deconstruction to read women's modernist fiction. She observes an alternative mode of experience to patriarchal culture and terms this the *feminine sublime*. Freeman reveals the patriarchal hegemony behind the concept of sublime, carefully distinguishing the feminine sublime to show her resistance to patriarchal binaries. In her theory, sublimity is not an aesthetic category but a moment of abjection. She emphasises the encounter of two parties and calls this encounter a site of self-transcendence (Freeman 1-2). Freeman's theory thus shifts from aesthetics to ethics, because it is centred on the power relations as they are encountered at the moment of transcendence. Against the Burke-Kantian tradition, the feminine sublime, according to Freeman's theory, is a domain of experience that resists categorisation, in which the subject enters into a relation with an otherness that is excessive and unrepresentable (2). The feminine sublime thus is a power that may resist patriarchal binaries. She too discovers the phenomenon of *double subjects* in women's modernist fiction which rather than seeking to dominate or domesticate each other, offers a "response to that which occurs at the very limits of symbolization" (9). Freeman, influenced by Irigaray and Kristeva, insists that the term *feminine* is used to contest binaries produced by the patriarchal order, including a rigid notion of sexual difference that insists on separating male and female selves (9-10).<sup>89</sup> In this respect, Joanna Zylinska provides a further elucidation, emphasising the encounter in the feminine sublime where double subjects are similarly crucial. Zylinska contends that encounter as the site of transcendence marks the suspension between the arrival

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<sup>89</sup> Based on the theory of French feminists, Freeman sees feminine as a pre-oedipal other, alien to the masculine symbolic system.

of the other and the moment of his/her appearance. She thus argues that in the feminine sublime there are two subjects which are not only exposed to each other but also need each other for the assertion of their own (temporary) subjectivity (97-105).

However, both the term *female sublime* and *feminine sublime* are problematic in referring to women's transcendence, because of the paradox implicit in their naming. On the one hand, both Yaeger and Freeman use a masculine term the *sublime* to designate women's transcendence. Both theorists coin the term based on the link between sublimity and transcendence in the traditional aesthetic discourse. Defining the sublime as "transcend[ing] normative/the human" (192), Yaeger directly borrows the term sublime from the Burke-Kantian theory, linking sublimity to transcendence without distinguishing them. In Freeman's conception, the sublime of traditional definition remains at work when the former is taken as the product of the dynamics between blockage and transcendence. The difference, Freeman insists, lies in the response or strategy of the subject when the gendered subject encounters the other. However, the link between sublimity and transcendence in her analysis is still based on masculine privilege presupposed by traditional aesthetic discourse. In the Burke-Kantian aesthetic tradition, sublime is considered as a form of masculine triumph because it takes the champion subject as men for granted. When Kant formulated the sublime, he took it as the key moment of transcendence, one that is achieved through masculinist power, such as Reason, and one which ultimately maintains and enlarges the masculine self. In other words, transcendence in Kant's conception is not transcendence for every individual as with Beauvoir, but for male transcendence only. In this sense, to name the actualisation of transcendence in general (either male or female) as the *sublime* remains a form of masculine privilege. Thus, to apply the term sublime to name transcendence is a reduction (and it is also a particular kind of historical contextualisation that privileges the dominant hegemony), which excludes the possibility of women's transcendence. The term *female sublime* and

*feminine sublime*, then, both have ambivalent implications and to some extent therefore, call the legitimacy of women's experience into question.

Both terms challenge the masculinity/femininity binary by paradoxically formulating a name based on the same binary. The theorists fall into the language dilemma as soon as they attempt to name the heterogeneous excess to the sublime. Both terms refer to an excess from the masculine sublime derived from women's literary creativity which the masculine term cannot accommodate. Thus, a new term is required. As their response, Freeman and Yaeger use the opposite concept to name this excess. However, this is an attempt to reconcile the excess in language by inviting it into discourse through applying the same *either/or* logos as the masculinity/femininity binary where the challenge to the binary becomes merely compliance, and where once again male experience becomes the criterion for measuring women's experience. Women's transcendence subsumed under these two alternative versions of the sublime becomes, therefore, no more than a supplement to a masculine aesthetic understanding.

The discussion surrounding the terms of *female sublime* and *feminine sublime* suggests that the issue of naming, however, is a problem of understanding the exact nature of the experience, in Joan Scott's words, of "the question of representation" (35). In her influential essay "Experience" (1991), Scott provides a post-structuralist way of defining experience.<sup>90</sup> She argues that experience is not a transparent and self-evident concept in traditional theoretical considerations but is constructed within discourse.

An empirical understanding of women's experience weakens both Yaeger and Freeman's theoretical power in formulating the name-as-signifier of their discovery. Either

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<sup>90</sup> This essay firstly appeared with the title "The Evidence of Experience". See Scott, Joan W. "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1991, pp. 773-797. The next year it was titled as "Experience" and collected into *Feminists Theorize the Political*. edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. Routledge, New York, 1992. pp. 22-40.

Yaeger's consideration of women's experience as a mode of experience or Freeman's formulation of women's experience as experience resisting categorisation takes the latter as a presumption, the direct origin of knowledge. This treatment reduces women's experience to objective things or evidence. As Scott argues, this treatment is unable to expose the difference but rather, neutralises it (25). When Yaeger and Freeman take women's experience as things, their task is reduced to modifying the current use of language, searching for the adequate register of this experience in the reservoir of existing vocabulary. In their formulation, this experience matches the existing concept of sublimity and the difference underlying women's experience to men's is assigned to the modifier female or feminine. As a result, Yaeger and Freeman have raised the question of women's experience and female transcendence and addressed it, but their revision remains within masculinist discourse. Accordingly, these two terms, although revealing the *double subjects* of women's transcendence, are inadequate to denote the distinctive form of women's transcendence symbolised in the poetry of 'new beauty', because the revision is still established on the beauty/sublimity binary.<sup>91</sup>

As Scott suggests, reading women's experience, as a construction within discourse reveals that the formula of *double subjects* constructs a different discourse from masculinist discourse, namely that of feminist discourse. To name women's transcendence as the sublime overlooks the fundamental change of the relation between the self and the other in women's transcendence. In other words, the traditional concept of the sublime excludes a situation whereby two parties may appear as equals at the same time because the object disappears as soon as sublimity is achieved. The dominating subject in the hegemonic definition of the

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<sup>91</sup> Patrick Wright discovers this problem underlying the term of the feminine sublime when he reflects on the theory of feminine sublime by considering the concept of sacred. He points out that the term is problematic since it is constructed on the base of the dualism of beauty and sublimity and fails to reflect the "true" feature of beauty in this experience. See Wright, Patrick. "A Timeless Sublime?: Reading the Feminine Sublime in the Discourse of the Sacred." *Angelaki*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2010, p. 85-100.

sublime is replaced by *double subjects* in women's transcendence. Scott's Kristevan view of experience supports my observation here. In Scott's view, the subject cannot determine his/her experience but rather, subjectivity is acquired the other way around. That is, it is the difference in lived experience that discursively constructs "subjects who see and act in the world" (Scott 25). And because of this, subjects in women's transcendence are constructed by discursively reorganising women's experience. By this means, their fundamental difference is brought to light, and *double subjects* that forms women's transcendence breach the hierarchical binary between subject and object, which, as discussed earlier, revolutionises the foundation of masculinist discourse.

The term 'new beauty' bearing a revolutionary power, contesting both female sublime and feminine sublime, is thus a superior means of denoting the discourse of women's transcendence. To name the experience of *hypsos* (elevation) as beauty successfully breaks the link between the sublime and transcendence, the product of the masculinity/femininity binary; while it equally suggests the existence of women and more importantly a women's aesthetic practice. By applying the term beauty to symbolise the actualisation of transcendence the fundamental divorce between the new transcendence and masculine power/hegemony is foregrounded. Because of the association of masculinity with the sublime, the term 'new beauty' becomes the crucial concept to contest for both H.D. and Chen. In realising the hegemony of the masculine subject in the sublime they also see that an alternative representation of the beautiful is required because it is the place to formulate a new relation between the self and the other. Thus, they re-employ beauty to embody the presence of the two equal subjects/objects in order to resist a dominating masculine/singular subject. The expression 'new beauty' thus signals a thorough break between the sublime and transcendence, by which the experience of women has been excluded.

Beauty has thus become a battle field. The place where masculinist ideology locks women to immanence is the place where women invest the meanings and values of their own. In other words, beauty is the place for ‘real’ women fighting against an imagined or symbolised woman. Naomi Wolf asserts in *Beauty Myth* that the ideology of beauty is the last ideology remaining with associations to the old feminine. She remarks: “although women have the right of vote, work and reproduction, the ideology of beauty remains powerful to control and objectify women at the end of the twentieth century”. (10-11) In this light, to revise and empower beauty becomes the most powerful, not to mention critical, political strategy.

In a nutshell, to name women’s transcendence as ‘new beauty’ shows its potential political power. On the one hand, these two poets claim the commonality between men and women as human beings. On the other, they create a new symbol to register their own experience rather than adopting the existing one. The anxiety of aphasia thus is replaced by the courage of creation. At this point, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ as a discourse of beauty is not only an attempt to dissolve patriarchal symbolism, but also a creation of feminist discourse in its own right.

#### 5.4 Feminist Discourse: a response to the emergence of “New Woman”

H.D. and Chen, among those who suffered from the anxiety of aphasia, but have then discovered a way to freely articulate. At this point, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ as feminist discourse, constructing women’s subjectivity based on the narrative of their experience, directly responds to the emergence of the New Woman in the context of modernism. At the turn of the twentieth century, modern industry profoundly changed ways of living and

consuming, and gave rise to the flourishing of the metropolis. Accordingly, humans' place and their relationships changed. Among these changes appeared the New Woman, the representation of the revolution of social gender relations between men and women.

The coinage of the phrase "New Woman", signalling the desire to remake the meaning of woman, indeed makes woman new. The New Woman thus suggests a form of empowering and self-definition. In the text, *Modernism Keywords* (2014), the term first appeared in Sarah Grand's "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" in 1894, in which Grand rejected the only two categories of women in men's eyes—the passive and convenient "cow-woman" and the degraded and dangerous "scum-woman"; hailing the "new woman" of the "future" as "stronger and wiser" (Cuddy-Keane 239).<sup>92</sup> Immediately, the utopian term sparked debate on both sides of the Atlantic and later around the world. The New Woman, therefore, became a target of fierce debates, as a formulation that turned "upside down" the traditional conception of women (Cuddy-Keane 240). Historian Martha Patterson notes the core questions in these debates:

Who was she and where did she come from? What did she represent? Would she last?  
Was she to be celebrated as the agent and sign of progress or reviled as a traitor to the  
traditional family and by extension her race? (1)

Feminist scholar Patricia Smith describes the main features of New Woman in her essay:

The New Woman ... clearly had a mind and wishes of her own. She defied traditional  
gender roles by seeking an education equal to that available to men as well as an  
occupation in which she could put her education to use and earn an independent  
income. Accordingly, she would be free to marry for love rather than economic

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<sup>92</sup> Martha Patterson adds that critics in America responded to this image as soon as it was coined in 1894 in *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J., 2008. p.1.

security...She challenged the norms that religion and society considered ordained by God and nature, cast off the restrictive corsets and crinolines that hampered a woman's bodily movements ... and sought to participate in the political processes that affected her life and liberty. (78)

Patterson adds that the term New Woman, denoting a character type and a cultural phenomenon, described women more broadly than, say, suffragist or settlement worker, while connoting a modern ideal of self-refashioning (2).

The notion of New Woman that led to heated debate in transatlantic society, was soon imported to China. Unlike its critical reception in Western society, however, the idea of New Woman was warmly embraced by Chinese intellectuals who aimed at promoting a democratic revolution of Chinese society. They attempted to incorporate this idea, promoting the social engagement of women as an embodiment of democracy into the discourse of national salvation and social progression. Amy Dooling outlines the rise of the New Woman in Chinese society in her *Women's Literary Feminism in Twentieth-Century China* (2005). In terms of her observation, the New Woman existed not just as a literary construct but constituted an emerging social category by the early Republican era (between 1912 and 1920s). She claims: "New Women, as they came to be known, exerted a visible impact on the social, political, and cultural landscape of 1920s and 1930s China" (65). Similar debates on this new social group by both men and women were developed and promoted in Chinese intellectual society.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Apart from Dooling, other critics also have mentioned that newspapers and magazines, as new media, in 1920s and 1930s, assumed a crucial role in promoting these debates so as to promote the idea of New Women. See Carol Chin "Translating the New Woman: Chinese Feminists View the West, 1905–15", *Gender & History*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2006, pp. 490-518. Feng, Jin. *New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction*, Purdue University Press, 2003.



As the debates went, the group of New Woman demanded adequate discourse to address, to describe and to answer the questions concerning them, and to construct their subjectivity. The rise of the New Woman thus revealed a blank not only in history but also language. The poetry of 'new beauty' thus is both a response and a solution to the demands of this newly emerging group of women seeking full representation.

H.D. and Chen were not only familiar with the idea of the New Woman, but also could be said to have brought the idea into practice. Each poet was educated as a "New Woman" in modern institutions when they were young girls. This education may have fostered their intellectual confidence and ambition. The Bryn Mawr College where H.D. received education, founded in 1885, was one of the first institutions of higher education in the United States to offer graduate degrees to women. The lyrics of the school song of the Lehsan Girl's High School, where Chen met her English teacher Cao Baohua, gives its educational goal: "why there could not be women who change the world?" (L. Chen "The Separation and Interrogation between Human and Nature" 33). Moreover, H.D. and Chen each became New Women when they later escaped from home to pursue their independence.<sup>94</sup> The poetry of 'new beauty' marks their personal life narratives and is the outcome of their practice to struggle for their independence while refusing passivity and the static time of traditional femininity. The inscription of the understanding of women's bodies and their bodily situation in the poetry of 'new beauty' responds to the questions raised by the debate on the New Woman: what a woman is in real life and the nature of the social place for them. Thus, the poetry of 'new beauty' as discourse constructs the experience of the poets as women and therefore meets the radically different needs of the era. In other words, the poetry

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<sup>94</sup> See the brief introduction to H.D. and Chen's personal experiences in their early days in Chapter Two.

of 'new beauty', constructing women's experience and subjectivity, responds to the rise of the New Woman, going as far as to provide a language at their disposal.

From prototype to social category, the New Woman generated from the complexity at the turn of the twentieth century, is one of the outcomes of profound social changes, emerging from a historical gap and developing in the modernist context. The radical changes of social relations give rise to the question of the subject which has traditionally assigned the superior position to males. The formula of the modern Western subject is based on Reason which lends unity and stability to the subject position. However, because universalised reason distinguishes between human and subhuman, or between consciousness and lack of reflective consciousness, in turn it creates social hierarchy. Peter Wagner argues that such a concept of universal reason needs to "set boundaries in the name of reason" and to remove the constructed and, thereby, distanced Other from the same time-space of humanity (38). He also points out that the gender hierarchy, among others, is an outcome of the project of the modern subject. In other words, the subject is a masculine subject and women are subsumed under the category of the masculine. Chinese masculine subjectivity, however, preserves in Confucian human inter-relatedness and the strong ties between individuals maintained by patriarchal institutions. Zhao Guoping observes the problem of this Confucian construction of the Chinese subject and points out that defining individuals as always in relation to others easily casts them as people with no need for individual space; therefore, concepts such as individual rights, freedom, and dignity are difficult to generate (42). In the network of human beings, women are the inferior gender, and like other inferior categories in relationship, lose the possibility to consciously build up self-awareness. The emergence of New Woman therefore echoes "the crisis of the subject" and through becoming incorporated in one of the

modernist agendas, forces the creation of a newer model of subjectivity.<sup>95</sup> In this sense, the poetry of 'new beauty' with the presence of women's subjectivity on the one hand responds to the collapse of the dominating male subject by reclaiming a subject-position for women, while on the other hand provides a solution of *double subjects* to the crisis by reconsidering subjectivity not as given, but constructed in reciprocity.

The poetry of 'new beauty', in collaboration with the rise of New Woman, thus reveals that as modernist artists, both H.D. and Chen were discontented with outdated traditional representations of women and dedicated themselves to the quest for a new way to articulate as women and for women in their time. The poetry of 'new beauty' thus is a direct response of the two women poets to their lives and situation and a solution to the social issue of their time. The poetry of 'new beauty' is thus a new form of feminist discourse, within which women's subjectivity as well as women's experience are not timeless but concrete, contextualised, and historised.

In conclusion, the poetry of 'new beauty' narrating women's experience and constructing women's subjectivity in an 'estranged' and defamiliarised way tells a different story about women's life. the seemingly distant poetic images which embodying 'new beauty' reflect their self-imposed exile, a way of women's social engagement. This irony suggests that the poetry of 'new beauty' is a feminist discourse, faithfully reflecting Chen and H.D.'s own perception of the time they lived in and is one that dismisses the notion of timeless women, but rather seeks to reflect women's time. The misreading of the irony underlying in the distant images of 'new beauty' as detaching itself and escaping from engagement with life is because the critics applied a masculinist critical discourse that fails to capture the meanings produced by the logic constructing women's experience. The poetry of

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<sup>95</sup> In his book *The Subject in Question* (2007), Christopher Soufas elucidates that Western modernism questioning Cartesian modern subject calls for a new account for the subject and subjectivity.

‘new beauty’ challenges the tradition inscribing patriarchal ontology and epistemology by dissolving the masculinity/femininity binary presupposed by masculinist discourse. On the other hand, responding to the notion of the New Woman, the poetry of ‘new beauty’ manifests both innovation and a new type of construction. Moreover, it also reconstructs the subjectivity of women and provides a new account for them by symbolising transcendence.

## Conclusion

Poetic estrangement is a device that re-personalises poetic images, which suggests a human body and its relationship with the external world. Through the poetry of ‘new beauty’, the poets unprecedentedly position their female bodies directly in the world. H.D. wrote in a public place, at the desk of the British Museum, rather than isolated at home as was Emily Dickinson. Chen Jingrong ran away from home as a teenage girl rather than becoming a foot-bound ‘lady’ embroidering at home. Their poetry reveals the women poets of independence and a new relationship between an *I* and the *other*: equal, concrete and interactive. The *I* is the perceiving and judging subject and also the material female body. She is both the gazer and gazed. She concretely exists with her body, powerful, active, enduring and surviving, towards the future.

This relationship shows the wake of gender-consciousness and a female-centred stance. The female body is the material container in and through which are inscribed biological sexual differences, but also one that lives out a concrete situation that imprints all the conditions of her existence. The female body, like the male one, is an object consisting of flesh and blood and also an instrument to understand and transform the external world. Individuals perceive the world and announce their existence through their bodies. Women can perceive, create and transcend through their bodies as men do. However, women’s bodies are conditioned in patriarchal society and depersonalised by masculinist discourse. As I have demonstrated in this study, this is the social origin of women’s anxiety over creation. Are women the creator or the created? Can women create? We can see the ambivalence of women poets poignantly represented in H.D.’s “Pygmalion” (1917). She writes:

Which am I,

the stone or the power  
that lifts the rock from the earth?  
am I the master of this fire,  
is this fire my own strength? (line 14-18)

Later in this poem, she answers herself:

I made image upon image for my use,  
I made image upon image, for the grace  
of Pallas was my flint  
and my help was Hephaestos.

I made god upon god  
step from the cold rock,  
I made the gods less than men  
for I was a man and they my work;  
And now what is it that has come to pass?  
for fire has shaken my hand,  
my strivings are dust. (27-37)

In this poem, the speaker, the brilliant Pygmalion, confused about his identity, shifts from the creator to created. This lessening reveals the poet's serious thinking of the question: who is

the object and who the subject in creation? It is the problem belonging to women poets, a problem of the creating Muse.

Through my study, H.D. and Chen's journey of exploring a new way to articulate is brought to light. In this study, poetic estrangement is offered as a cure for the estranged women, the alienated women in masculinist discourse. They each began their journeys as repressed girls suffering from anxiety within the constraints imposed by their families. They escaped from these social constraints again and again. When they gained their autonomy, standing at the border ("The Edge outside the Edge"), they wrote poetry of 'new beauty'. This is undoubtedly a form of modernist poetic practice, reflecting their perception of temporality, fragmentation, and chaos in war. This is also a discourse of beauty conceiving a powerful new understanding of beauty and how it might function. More importantly, it symbolises women's transcendence to empower women. At this point, the poetry of 'new beauty' not only challenges a dualistic aesthetic tradition but also subverts a masculinist discourse operating on the masculinity/femininity binary. In this respect, it is a mode of feminist discourse, which reclaims women's agency and constructs women's subjectivity to respond to the emergence of New Woman in the context of modernism. In this sense, the two poets re-personalise the depersonalised; not only reviving beauty but also women. Against the image of Eliotian "the waste land" created by their male contemporaries, Chen and H.D. envision and anticipate a new world of 'new beauty' which is healed from the reduction of human beings-become-machines, and from the trauma of war and the oppression of hegemony. This is the utopian, political authority in H.D. and Chen's aesthetics of 'new beauty'.

The reading of the poetry of 'new beauty' in the context of modernism comes to a conclusion which echoes the observation of Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane in the introduction to *Modernism 1890-1930*: "Modernism is less a style than a search for a style in

a highly individualistic sense” (29). In this sense, H.D. and Chen’s creation and exploration formulates a new aesthetic intervention in modernism. Meanwhile, there is also the revolutionary power of poetic language. From the anxiety of aphasia to articulate their own ‘reality’, these two poets not only realise their own self-accomplishment in the realm of poetry, but also actualise their own transcendence. However, this is not the end of their exploration. With the confidence generated by writing the ‘new beauty’ poetry, the two poets then embarked on more difficult but more profound poetic tasks. The poetry of ‘new beauty’ thus is a model of women’s modernist exploration. H.D. and Chen are not escapists. On the contrary, they creatively respond to their era.

As it is mentioned in Chapter Five, Beauvoir posits a women’s collective transcendence in the future through the progressive individual fulfilment. H.D. and Chen’s exploration as the examples of individual achievements from different cultures thus provide a paradigm for the construction of feminist discourse and ongoing liberation of women.



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## Appendix

the Appendix contains H.D. and Chen's poetry (selection) of 'new beauty'. H.D.'s poetry, including the sea-flower quintet and "Sheltered Garden", is quoted from *Collected Poems, 1912-1944* (1983). The selection of Chen Jingrong's poetry of 'new beauty' is quoted from *The Collected Poems and Essays of Chen Jingrong* (2008) and the English translation is from me. Because the translation serves the end of the textual analysis in this thesis, I sometimes sacrifice the artistic quality for the faithful presentation of the meaning of words and the formal arrangement in the original Chinese text. The sequence of the poems follows the order in the original text.

### The Selected poems of H.D.

#### Sea Rose

Rose, harsh rose,  
marred and with stint of petals,  
meagre flower, thin,  
sparse of leaf,

more precious

5

than a wet rose

single on a stem---

you are caught in the drift.



Stunted, with small leaf,  
you are flung on the sand,                   10  
you are lifted  
in the crisp sand  
that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose  
drip such acrid fragrance                   15  
hardened in a leaf?

### Sea Lily

Reed,  
slashed and torn  
but doubly rich---  
such great heads as yours  
drift upon temple-steps,                   5  
but you are shattered  
in the wind.

Myrtle-bark  
is flecked from you,

scales are dashed 10  
from your stem,  
sand cuts your petal,  
furrows it with hard edge,  
like flint  
on a bright stone. 15

Yet though the whole wind  
slash at your bark,  
you are lifted up,  
aye---though it hiss  
to cover you with froth. 20

### Sea Poppies

Amber husk  
fluted with gold,  
fruit on the sand  
marked with a rich grain,  
treasure 5  
spilled near the shrub-pines  
to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root  
among wet pebbles  
and drift flung by the sea 10  
and grated shells  
and split conch-shells.

Beautiful, wide-spread,  
fire upon leaf,  
what meadow yields 15  
so fragrant a leaf  
as your bright leaf?

### Sea Iris

#### I

Weed, moss-weed,  
root tangled in sand,  
sea-iris, brittle flower,  
one petal like a shell  
is broken, 5  
and you print a shadow  
like a thin twig.

Fortunate one,  
scented and stinging,  
rigid myrrh-bud, 10  
camphor-flower,  
sweet and salt---you are wind  
in our nostrils.

## II

Do the murex-fishers  
drench you as they pass? 15  
Do your roots drag up colour  
from the sand?  
Have they slipped gold under you---  
rivets of gold?

Band of iris-flowers 20  
above the waves,  
you are painted blue,  
painted like a fresh prow  
stained among the salt weeds.

Sea Violet

The white violet  
is scented on its stalk,  
the sea-violet  
fragile as agate,  
lies fronting all the wind                    5  
among the torn shells  
on the sand-bank.

The greater blue violets  
flutter on the hill,  
but who would change for these            10  
who would change for these  
one root of the white sort?

Violet  
your grasp is frail  
on the edge of the sand-hill,                15  
but you catch the light---  
frost, a star edges with its fire.

Sheltered Garden

I have had enough.

I gasp for breath.

Every way ends, every road,  
every foot-path leads at last  
to the hill-crest--- 5  
then you retrace your steps,  
or find the same slope on the other side,  
precipitate.

I have had enough---  
border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies, 10  
herbs, sweet-cress.

O for some sharp swish of a branch---  
there is no scent of resin  
in this place,  
no taste of bark, of coarse weeds, 15  
aromatic, astringent---  
only border on border of scented pinks.

Have you seen fruit under cover  
that wanted light---  
pears wadded in cloth, 20

protected from the frost,  
melons, almost ripe,  
smothered in straw?

Why not let the pears cling  
to the empty branch? 25

All your coaxing will only make  
a bitter fruit---

let them cling, ripen of themselves,  
test their own worth,  
nipped, shrivelled by the frost, 30  
to fall at last but fair  
with a russet coat.

Or the melon---  
let it bleach yellow  
in the winter light, 35  
even tart to the taste---  
it is better to taste of frost---  
the exquisite frost---  
than of wadding and of dead grass.

For this beauty, 40  
beauty without strength,  
chokes out life.

I want wind to break,  
scatter these pink-stalks,  
snap off their spiced heads,                    45  
fling them about with dead leaves---  
spread the paths with twigs,  
limbs broken off,  
trail great pine branches,  
hurled from some far wood                    50  
right across the melon-patch,  
break pear and quince---  
leave half-trees, torn, twisted  
but showing the fight was valiant.

O to blot out this garden                    55  
to forget, to find a new beauty  
in some terrible  
wind-tortured place.

### **The Selected Poems of Chen Jingrong**

The Edge outside the Edge

I am the sail against the wind,



I am the thirsty stream;

I am a white candle

burning quietly,

burning and illuminating 5

the embankment of night.

Which harbour

will I sail to stay?

Which kind of flowers will fall

into my warm ripples. 10

Wind, rain,

if you thrust your anger toward me,

your angry strings can only play

the ode of my burning.

My sorrow and 15

my joy?

They are the sharpest axe and chisel

cutting through all the hard rocks.

Outside the embankment of the night

I possess a field of young grassland, 20

over there the dew has

a fresh shiver;

it spreads like

a field of green hope,

extending tenderly 25

towards the edge outside the edge.

### 边缘外的边缘

我是引满了风的

一片白帆，

我是蓄满着渴意的

一道河溪；

我是一支白色的蜡烛

安静地燃烧，

燃烧而且照亮着夜的长堤。

哪一个港岸

我将去投宿？

什么花将飘落在

我温暖的水波？

风啊，雨啊，

将若你们向我发怒，

从你们发怒的琴弦上

也只能弹奏出

我燃烧的颂歌。

我的痛苦和

我的欢欣吗

它们都是最犀利的

刀斧和凿子，

可以穿透所有

坚硬的顽固的岩石。

在黑夜的堤外

我有一片年青的草原，  
在那儿露珠带着新鲜的战栗；  
它铺展有如  
一片绿色的希望，  
温柔的延伸  
向边缘外的边缘。

### The Non-Flowering Branch

Like in the leaf-falling late autumn,  
suddenly recalling in spring  
the bright sunshine,  
tender rain.

The letter from an old friend brings back memory; 5  
in the dark night, watching the lights, watching the stars,  
as if I am the blowing wind,  
always traveling, seldom stay.

Now I paused on the keyboard of memory,  
but I cannot play a piece of elegy with it. 10  
I have only perplexity,  
mixing with pity, mixing with hope.

The non-flowering branch  
has a more beautiful shiver than flowers;  
oh of autumn, I love only 15  
the red leaves in your sighing wind.

If all my passion turned into ashes—  
Can you tell me, what I would be?  
Thinking of it, I am the flame, and  
How many times should I be burnt, towards death? 20

### 不开花的树枝

像是在落叶的深秋，

偶然记起春日里

阳光的明媚，

雨的温柔。

故人书信带来的惆怅怀旧

黑夜里望灯火，望星，

仿佛自己是一丝游风，

总在疾走，很少停留。

如今停留在记忆的琴键上

也弹不起挽歌；

我有的只是一片迷茫，

渗和着惋惜渗和着希望。

不开花的树枝

有比花更美的战栗；

秋天呵，我独爱

你潇潇风中的红叶。

假若热情化灰——

你说，我将怎么样？

想想吧，我便是那火，

还得多少次燃烧，归向死亡？

The Fresh Thirsty

I miss you, some

of the old days that never again come.

As in the memory,

the autumn rain is warm,

the dark clouds are bright.

5

But I shall miss more

the unpredictable days in the future;

regarding hope the dusk is always like the dawn,

has the sun, has the flying birds,

has the shiver when the breeze touches the tree.

10

I have scooped up spring water in my hand and drunk,  
  
much, much, but they  
  
cannot ease my thirsty;  
  
from rivers to rivers,  
  
from oceans to oceans...

15

I never know when  
  
I can reach the fullness of my life.

I am thirsty. Through  
  
joy and anxiety,  
  
my soul is burning restlessly;

20

I am bored with today  
  
bored with the moment just past—  
  
bored even with my thirsty,  
  
if it is not enough fresh.

新鲜的焦渴



我怀念你们，一些

永不复来的时光；

因为在怀念中

秋雨也温暖，

乌云的颜色也很淡。

但是我更加怀念

不可知未来的日子；

在希望中黄昏永远像黎明，

有太阳，有飞鸟，

有轻风拂树的颤栗。

我掬饮过很多种泉水，

很多，很多，但它们

没有将我的焦渴冲淡；

从江河到江河，

从海洋到海洋……

我不知道哪一天

才能找到生命的丰满。

我焦渴着。通过了

多少欢乐，多少忧患，

我的灵魂不安地炽热；

我厌倦今日，

厌倦刚刚逝去的瞬间——甚至连我的焦渴我也要厌倦，

假若它已经不够新鲜。

### The Early Morning Stroll

Strolling on the morning grassland,

the dew kisses my bare feet,

the wood is like a blessing.

All kinds of Bird-songs are flying

between nature and me,

5

breaking through

an invisible screen.

A cool breeze, shivering leaves,  
the blue-sky fragments in the cracks between leaves,  
like pieces of blue glass, 10  
we can sew a new pattern with them,  
bring it back to hang from the roof corner.

When did the night fall to sleep?  
when did the day wake up?  
From the back of the hills the fresh sun 15  
splashes white, red, and gold,  
the earth gently unfolding.

### 清晨散步

漫步于清晨的草地，  
露珠吻着赤裸的双足，  
树林像是一个深深的祝福。  
各种鸟语穿梭在  
大自然和我之间

穿透了一幅

不可见的帘幕。

清凉的微风，颤抖的树叶，

蓝空在叶缝里碎成片片，

像是一些蓝色的玻璃，

我们可以重加穿缀，

带回去张挂在屋角。

长夜已在何时睡去？

白日已在何时醒来？

年青的太阳从群山背后

泼洒出白色，红色同金色，

大地轻轻地舒开

闪光的胸怀。